Curriculum Development as a Subversive Activity? Discourse and Ideology in the Evolution of Curriculum Policy in Ireland 1980-2005

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is entirely my own work and that it has not been submitted as an exercise for a diploma or degree in any other college or university. I agree that the library may lend or copy the thesis upon request from the date of deposit of the thesis.

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ABSTRACT
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Gary Granville

This is a study of the evolution of curriculum policy and the discourses that have accompanied it. Three inter-related issues comprise the essential focus of the research: firstly, the manner in which curriculum discourse has evolved over the period in question, as the locus of activity has moved in a sequence of shifts from the periphery to the centre; secondly, the extent to which, at critical moments, national policy has responded in an ideological manner or otherwise to the discourse that has been generated at the margins; and thirdly, the extent to which the national curriculum policy that has emerged has adopted, reflected or facilitated the same range of neo-liberal orthodoxies that has been identified in the international literature on education policy.

A review of the literature addresses the contested role of qualitative research in education policy studies. A distinction is drawn between the processes of evaluation and critique. The thesis is conceived as an exercise in critique, adopting perspectives drawn from the contrasting positions of Habermas and Foucault, and shaped by the arts education sensibilities articulated by Eisner.

Two complementary research methods are adopted in the study. Firstly, critical discourse analysis is used as a lens through which landmark curriculum policy documents are analysed at three key moments in the period under review – the early to mid 1980s, the early to mid 1990s and the early to mid 2000s. Secondly an arts-based perspective, comprising an auto-ethnographic narrative approach that draws upon elements of the visual arts pedagogic encounter known as 'the crit', is utilised to capture the experience of the researcher in his role as an active agent in the process under review.

The growth and development of the discourses of change, of flexibility and of consultation are identified and examined. Three conclusions are drawn. Firstly, curriculum discourse was generated by forces at the margins of the education system. A central feature of the early curriculum development movement was the empowerment of the teacher. Curriculum discourse subsequently has signalled a sequence of shifts from the periphery to the centre. This has shaped the creation of policy, in the absence of any pre-existing coherent or rational curriculum policy principles. As each of these shifts occurred, a repositioning of the centre and periphery also occurred. Secondly, at critical moments, the discourse generated at the margins has been adopted at the centre, through a form of co-option or colonisation, but this rhetoric has not been realised in policy implementation. Thirdly, while the policy orientation of the centre has not been overtly ideological, nevertheless it has facilitated neo-liberal policy shifts. This has had the more generalised effect of not just neutralising the key agent in the system, the teacher, but of co-opting most other agents as complicit partners in this operative, if not intended, project of de-professionalising the teacher.

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND ACRONYMS

ASTI	Association of Secondary Teachers, Ireland
CDC	Curriculum Development Centre, Shannon
CDU	Curriculum Development Unit, Dublin
CDVEC	City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee
CEB	Interim Curriculum and Examinations Board
DES	Department of Education and Science
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute
Fianna Fáil	The largest political party in Ireland
Fine Gael	The second largest political party
Junior Cycle	Lower Secondary, final phase of compulsory schooling
LC	Leaving Certificate (established)
LCA	Leaving Certificate Applied
LCVP	Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme
NCC	National Competitiveness Council
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NESC	National Economic and Social Council
NFQ	National Framework of Qualifications
NQAI	National Qualifications Authority of Ireland
Oireachtas	Houses of parliament
Senior Cycle	Upper Secondary, post-compulsory period of schooling
Taoiseach	Prime Minister
TUI	Teachers' Union of Ireland
TYP	Transition Year Programme
VPT	Vocational Preparation and Training courses
VTOS	Vocational Training Opportunity Scheme
Youthreach	National programme for early school leavers

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in Ireland 1980-2005

GARY GRANVILLE

A Thesis
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INTRODUCTION

Focus of the Research

This thesis is concerned with curriculum policy in Ireland from the late 1970s to the first decade of the 21st century. As a study of policy evolution, it is concerned with internal and external influences on curriculum, with policy borrowing and policy amnesia, and with concepts of the curriculum in terms of ownership and subversion[1]. The metaphor of the palimpsest – a parchment of script, erased and over-written – is used as a recurring point of reference in the evolution of that policy: tracing the vestiges of the original impetus for change after adoption and adaptation in the trajectory of policy from the periphery to the centre. The researcher has been an active participant in the process under scrutiny, and the experience of this participation is used as an active ingredient in the research project.

The thesis has emerged from three inter-connecting streams of research interest – the politics of education, curriculum development practice and policy, and arts-based research. It utilises two specific fields of research methodologies – critical discourse analysis and auto-ethnographic narrative.

The first research stream is concerned with the politics of education policy. There is a significant body of international literature on the shaping of contemporary education policy with reference to dominant neo-liberal economic policies, policy borrowing and globalisation. A key concern of the present research is to examine the extent to which such forces have been present and influential in the Irish context.

The second and parallel stream is the evolution of curriculum development policy and practice in Ireland. This is seen as an evolution from the position where the thrust for

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[1] 'Subversion' in this thesis is taken to mean the potential for individuals and groups of teachers and others to interpret and implement the curriculum in terms of their own values and of the needs of their students, pupils or learners, even if such interpretation sometimes might run counter to the received orthodoxy of the central curriculum designers.

curriculum development was being generated at the margins of the system to one where it has come to shape, and be shaped by, national policy.

The third stream of research orientation is drawn from the field of arts-based research. The arts in research operate in three interlinked ways (VanHalen-Faber and Diamond, 2008, p. 570): as a preoccupation with imaginative experience, as a form of theoretical research that applies concepts from the arts to inquiry, and as a means of reviewing research, self-identity and social issues through blending post-modern literary, visual and text-based approaches. This arts-based perspective has facilitated the present researcher in adopting an epistemological position and in finding a voice and register for this thesis.

The methodological approach adopted is particularly concerned with the analysis of official or authoritative curriculum policy documents in terms of their provenance and their meaning. Silverman (2007) notes how qualitative researchers often undervalue the written text, using it more as background or reference than as source material. By contrast, he suggests a number of advantages pertaining to textual data, including their richness in getting at subtleties and nuances, their capacity to illustrate how we see the world and how we act and their capacity to document what participants are actually doing in the world. There is, however, a need for research to go within the text, not to focus on its objective truth or otherwise but to enter it in order to understand it and explain how it arrives at its logic and conclusion.

Through the application of elements of critical discourse analysis, key texts from three significant moments of curriculum policy formulation are examined. Critical discourse analysis explores the relationships between discursive practices, events, and texts on the one hand, and wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes on the other. It investigates how texts construct representations of the world, social relationships and social identities, and there is an emphasis on highlighting how such practices and texts are ideologically shaped by relations of power (Taylor 2004, p. 435).

A second research technique has been employed, to complement the analysis of official policy texts. The narrative approach of auto-ethnography has been adopted to capture the engaged role of the researcher within the processes being described. As a means of reflection, some self-authored texts roughly contemporaneous with the three moments of scrutiny are examined in this parallel narrative. These writings are utilised as evidence or sources in much the same way as student artists present sources for their work in the critical encounter known as 'the crit'.

Structure of Thesis

The thesis is a study and critique of curriculum policy, especially the evolution of senior cycle (upper secondary) curriculum policy, in Ireland in the quarter century up to the year 2005. It provides a critical evaluation of the national policy-making process through two research lenses:

- o an application of a critical discourse analysis of landmark policy statements over the twenty five years in question; and
- o an application of an arts-based critique, through the lens of an auto-ethnographical narrative that employs elements of the visual arts pedagogic and evaluative instrument known as *the crit*.

The sequence of chapters is as follows:

1. *Critique and evaluation in education*: A treatment of the literature in respect of critique in education, this chapter first addresses some aspect of the continuing debate about the purposes of educational evaluation, in particular as it pertains to policy studies. The criticisms of qualitative research projects in terms of validity and usefulness for policy makers are examined and some particular methodologies are scrutinised. The contrasting views of Habermas and Foucault on critique as a process of evaluation are discussed in terms of their significance for this thesis.

2. *Critical Discourse Analysis and Auto-ethnography*: The particular methodologies to be utilised in the thesis are next dealt with in some detail. Critical discourse

3. *Three Moments – One: Early Positions*. Curriculum policy and practice in Ireland from the early 1980s to the present are outlined in terms of three crucial moments: a brief overview of the historical context is provided. The first moment is located in the mid 1980s with the establishment of the interim Curriculum and Examinations Board (CEB), later to become the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA). Two key publications of that era are examined.

4. *Three Moments – Two: Established Positions:* The second moment occurs in the mid 1990s, a period of unprecedented critique of education policy and a flurry of publication and activity in transforming the shape of senior cycle policy. Three significant documents – a government Green Paper and White Paper, as well as a related NCCA policy document – are analysed in terms of their curriculum discourse.

5. *Three Moments – Three: Future Positions:* The third moment, half-way through the first decade of the 2000s is finally addressed. A significant and detailed NCCA policy publication is critically examined in the light of the earlier moments, and in terms of the response it generated.

6. *Auto-ethnographic reflection*: A parallel narrative is introduced in this chapter, an auto-ethnographic account derived from the role, experience and perceptions of the author as an active participant through the moments described above. This is presented as a narrative story within the frame of *the crit*. The methodology and practice of *the crit* is adopted, with the author in the role of the artist presenting a rationale and explanation for his work.

In the crit, artists typically present their sources, the working through of ideas, work in progress, and similar material as a means of describing to peers, tutors and critics what their work is about and what they are trying to achieve. This chapter relies on a few forgotten or unpublished papers written by the author at more or less the same time as the moments chosen for study in the thesis.

7. *Policy review: The Evolution of Curriculum Discourse*: In a review of the evolution of curriculum policy and the discourses that accompanied it through the past three decades, an overview of the three moments of scrutiny is presented. Three inter-related issues are examined:

   a. the manner in which curriculum discourse has evolved over that period, as the locus of activity has been moved in a sequence of shifts from the periphery to the centre.

   b. the extent to which, at critical moments, national policy has responded in an ideological manner or otherwise to the discourse that has been generated at the margins.

   c. the extent to which the national curriculum policy that has emerged has adopted, reflected or facilitated the same range of neo-liberal orthodoxies that have been identified in the international literature on education policy.

8. *Conclusions* for the thesis are presented, through aligning the critical discourse analysis and the narrative research. The research methodologies themselves are assessed in terms of their validity and value for education policy studies. The nature and meaning of curriculum development and its evolution in Ireland over the past three decades is explored.

CHAPTER ONE

Critique and Evaluation in Education

Introduction

This thesis is concerned with the evolution over three decades of national curriculum policy and practice in Ireland. It addresses the conflicts and faultlines between change advocacy and policy formulation, and in particular the moments of change when new policies are proposed, adopted, co-opted or rejected within the policy-making processes of the state.

While there is a substantial body of international literature on educational policy and curriculum reform in upper secondary education, the Irish research is still relatively undeveloped. Recent years have seen some significant research development however. O'Sullivan (2005) has produced a major overview of the changing discourses in Irish education while Gleeson (2000) has produced an authoritative treatment of the macro-environment and context within which the curriculum debate of the past twenty years has been conducted. Other recent and relevant Irish research includes Sugrue (2004) on curriculum and ideology, Mullins (2002) on the development of national curriculum change in one subject (2003), Trant (1997) on the curriculum development experience of a local agency and Daly (2005) on the 'naïve assumption' that enlightened central curriculum planning can be successfully realised at local level.

A blend of perspectives is used in this thesis in order to test a critical approach which draws on disparate philosophical and arts-based traditions of critique. The research approach adopted includes two key methods of a qualitative nature. Specifically, the thesis incorporates elements of critical discourse analysis (CDA), addressing selected landmark policy documents that explicitly or implicitly deal with national curriculum policy. Secondly, the thesis utilises a model of critique, derived from two arts practices: the visual art education practice of 'the crit', and an auto-ethnographic narrative research model.

Evaluation in education

In curriculum and programme evaluation, a certain format has developed in Ireland, influenced by international practice. In EU programme funding through consecutive national development plans, including education, since the 1990s, evaluation has become a condition of financial support. This format characteristically employs a mix of quantitative and qualitative methodologies, with a focus on impact and outcomes. Such evaluations are invariably commissioned by official government or government-funded agencies. Recent examples of such evaluations include commissioned reviews of school support services carried out by Murchan et al (2005), Tuohy and Lodge (2003) and Sugrue et al (2001), DES Inspectorate curriculum evaluation reports (2005, 2006, 2007a) and a meta-review of the teacher education section of the DES itself (2007b). The present researcher has himself been engaged in a number of such projects in recent years in Ireland and South Africa (Granville 1999, 2004, 2005).

However, this researcher has felt some unease at the lack of full articulation between the methodologies of such evaluations and the curriculum aspirations informing the original initiatives. While such evaluations as those noted above can be very valuable and informative, this present research project seeks to explore whether another dimension of evaluation can be achieved through the application of less familiar techniques of critique. Specifically, this research quest is informed by the idea of understanding curriculum design as an art-form as well as a social practice, and the research tries to incorporate a methodology that is faithful to an art-related process of critique. Evaluation of art is an inherently fluid process, one that relies on informed, collaborative, negotiated and engaged judgement, what Eisner calls 'connoisseurship' (1985, 2001a, inter alia).

That 'curriculum' might be better understood as an art artefact is an idea also influenced by Schwartz (2006). He cites Overly and Spalding (1993, p. 148) who proposed that the novel should be used as a metaphor for curriculum writing:

> If novels are open to multiple interpretations, they are also open to 'misinterpretations'. Too often curricula are designed to prevent possibilities for 'misinterpretation'. That's too bad. By eliminating possibilities for

misinterpretation, we eliminate possibilities for interpretation, and thereby, learning.

Schwartz claims that 'the teacher, like a good novel reader, should encounter and be empowered to consider multiple approaches to conceptualising and presenting content, recognising that just as there is no single correct understanding of the novel, so too there are multiple ways to interpret the content of the curriculum (2006, p. 452). Openness to multiple meanings and interpretations does not mean that all interpretations are equally valid. There is an inherently heavy responsibility on the interpreters to justify and validate their position rather than assume common consent. This very process of validity-claim, if successfully achieved, can lend rigour and authority to such interpretations.

The concepts of *critique* and *evaluation* are central to this thesis. Evaluation may be distinguished from critique by the sense of uncontested desired outcomes that implicitly underpin most evaluation projects. Thus the three pragmatic questions that Hargreaves (1996) proposed for educational research – 'what works, why does it work, how best can it be replicated?' – presuppose a shared and uncontested understanding of the purposes both of educational practice and of research metrics. Critique on the other hand is understood here to be a process of engagement with the subject which is open-ended and allows for the possibility of multiple meanings and diverse or contradictory interpretations.

In the rest of this chapter, the role and purposes of educational research – and specifically education policy research – are examined in the context of the wider international debate on these issues. The use of qualitative measures in policy-related research has been seen in some quarters as problematic, and this issue is specifically addressed, with particular reference to the medical model of research which is often cited in contradistinction to educational research practice.

Education policy research

The dominance of qualitative methodologies in educational research has been frequently noted. Two recent commentaries on the pattern of research prevalent in the American

Educational Research Association (AERA) dramatically illustrate the concerns. Eckardt (2007) noting Hess's (2007) comments that a lot of educational research is 'ideological, frivolous, poorly executed and jargon-laden', examined data from the annual AERA conference programme. He records that no more than one-in-four research papers use a strict quantitative methodology, the remaining papers using qualitative, mixed-method or conceptual/theoretical methodologies. Eckhart questions 'the disproportionate amount of qualitative research and whether or not this positions the field well for scientific purposes' because he believes that qualitative studies are hard to replicate and are detrimental to the development of accepted concepts and shared ideas. The distinguishing features of a viable research culture are absent, he claims, from educational research practice:

> In formidable sciences, a prevalence of quantitative or mathematical inquiry is far more conducive to co-authorship, replication and citation, which are critical to the generation of accepted core ideas, which in turn are critical to the establishment and legitimation of a knowledge domain (2007, p. 2).

The absence of a strong practice-focused body of shared knowledge and reliable understandings of the process of education - and specifically of schooling - is also noted by McClintock (2007). Using the AERA *Handbook of Research on Teaching* (2001) as an exemplar of the current state of the art of educational research, he suggests that 'educational research has become absurd, out of harmony with sound judgement' (p. 1). McClintock's concern is based on the proposition, implicit in most educational research and explicitly stated in the AERA handbook, that such research should inform practice-policy, school administration, teaching instruction and parenting. Noting that powerful routines and massive institutional inertia dominate the real life conditions of schools, he asserts that educational research has failed to provide practitioners (teachers) with a means to intervene effectively in those realities. The 'absurdity' of educational research, according to McClintock, is that

> educational research accumulates in great, growing bulk, with all manner of contradictory findings, and no leverage by which to affect practice in any significant way … The vast bulk of educational research will have no effect on anything except the process of recruitment, promotion, and tenure in schools of education (2007, p. 2).

The common concern of both Eckhardt and McClintock is that educational research is persistently failing to generate a body of knowledge which is accepted by practitioners, fellow researchers and policy makers, and upon which policy and practice can be based. The model of a research domain that both writers appear to desire is that of the physical sciences and medicine, where cumulative and incremental research growth contributes to a common store of knowledge and an accepted set of core assumptions and shared understandings.

These concerns, articulated in the context of educational research in the USA, are echoed in recent debates in the UK. Hargreaves (1996) alleged that there is a considerable amount of

> frankly second rate educational research which does not make a serious contribution to fundamental theory or knowledge; which is irrelevant to practice; which is uncoordinated with any preceding or follow-up research; and which clutters up academic journals that virtually nobody reads (in Tooley 1998, p. 7).

The three perceived weaknesses of educational research practice set out by Hargreaves and developed by Tooley (1998) – the lack of serious contribution to fundamental knowledge, the irrelevance to practice and the lack of accumulation – were central to the ensuing debate, which is echoed in the AERA-targeted criticisms of Eckhardt and McClintock. The use of systematic reviews based on verifiable and measurable evidence is central to the arguments of those critical of current educational research. Research synthesis – surveys of literature on selected topics, itemising the common criteria, concepts and principles used in an attempt to measure what cumulative or concerted wisdom can be inferred – is seen as crucial for research to be a positive contributor to practice. 'If the notion of evidence is to mean anything other than the intellectual property of elite groups, the accessibility of both the process and the results of research synthesis to a range of users must be an integral value' (Oakley, 2002, p. 279). The medical model of research, with its accumulation of verifiable data and its incremental development across an extended community of researchers, figures as an exemplar in the criticisms of educational research. Some key issues that arise in this debate are briefly considered in the following paragraphs.

Oakley (2002) sets out four challenges for social science and for educational research: to revisit critically the question of the differences between medicine and the other professions, to find ways to reduce bias in policy and practice evaluation, to develop methods for assessing the trustworthiness of qualitative research and to soften the polemic between quantitative and qualitative methods. In attempting to overcome these challenges, she certainly does not succeed in the last of these objectives, as her own polemic contributes further heat to an already hot debate.

Critical of the lack of coordinated and cumulative research, she claims that 'most traditional literature reviews are discursive rampages through selected bits of literature the researcher happens to know about or can easily reach on his or her bookshelves at the time' (p. 277). Oakley is concerned about the risks involved in policy based on dominant practices in educational research,

> where so much of the evidence is derived from small scale qualitative research, depends heavily on practitioner judgements about the right thing to do, and/or is taken from poorly evaluated interventions (p. 282).

She fears that, unless qualitative studies are conducted on a sufficiently large scale, research data could actually be harmful and damaging if used as the basis for policy implementation. The predominance of qualitative research is also noted by Oakley, who is not convinced by the 'technical fixes' she discerns in support of much of this research: purposive sampling, grounded theory, multiple coding, triangulation and respondent validation. None of these is 'anything more than spurious 'bumper stickers' designed to boost academic credibility' (p 284), she claims, citing Barbour in the *British Medical Journal* (2001, p. 322) in support of her argument.

However, a closer reading of Barbour displays a more nuanced and positive engagement with qualitative research methodologies than that displayed by Oakley. Barbour is broadly supportive of the nature of good qualitative research but is disturbed by what she perceives as the 'checklist' approach to application of such methods, whereby such checklists are presented almost as guarantors of rigour (by journal criteria, for instance). Barbour, in summary, is not criticising the use of qualitative approaches, either in health

services research or in social science. She is critical of the underachievement of valuable qualitative approaches, not their essential validity (p. 1117). Barbour makes a significant distinction between medical research and health services research, the former being concerned chiefly with research in the natural sciences (e.g. biology, biochemistry, pathology, haematology, cardiology). This distinction is not made by many critics of educational research who employ the term 'medical research' as if it covers all fields within the health sector.

In assessing the appropriateness of the medical model of research for educational research, Evans and Benefield (2001) conclude that

> … this emerging movement of 'evidence based policy and practice' in the public sector will steer educational research in the direction of a 'medical model' … Such an approach will tend to reduce research questions to the pragmatics of technical efficiency and effectiveness (p. 539).

While noting some of the real risks to the integrity of research activities in such a model, Evans and Benefield are convinced that the product is worth the price. The movement of health care practice from one based on tradition and personal preference to one based on research evidence is a model they wish to see in education:

> The experience of health care has indicated that it is possible to move from a situation where practice is based on tradition or personal preference to one where it is based on sound research evidence (p. 540).

Stritikus and Weiss (2006) note the apparent rationality of the medical model as a template for educational research. However, like Barbour above, they identify the complexity of medical research itself as a point of reference for the even more complex field of educational research:

> On the surface, calls for educational research to become more like medical research seem reasonable. However, viewed in light of the issues faced by the medical community regarding the growing treatment gap for diverse groups, such praise of the medical model is in need of reassessment. The manner in which medical practice has been complicated by issues of race, culture, and ideology provides an opportunity to examine the role of educational research in addressing the pressing educational concerns of our times (p. 1107).

Hammersley (2001), in one of a number of contributions he has made to the debate, responded to the specific assertion of the primacy of 'evidence-based research'. He notes

that this constituency of interest and in particular its usurpation of the descriptive label 'evidence-based research', has commandeered research funding in the UK through its political linkage to a movement for accountability and transparency – the 'audit society'. He makes this telling point about advocates of 'systematic reviews' and 'evidence-based research': that 'by implicitly dismissing what they oppose, these labels operate as highly effective slogans, especially in a climate which favours the sound-bite' (p. 551). In other words, by claiming to be 'evidence-based' researchers they imply that those researchers who do not adhere to their model are actually engaging in research that is *not* based on evidence. This pre-emptive 'claim-jumping' (like similar self-descriptors employed by 'pro-life' or 'anti-war' campaigners) immediately places them on the moral high ground: dissenters are placed in a defensive position, having to justify the validity of their claims against the criteria set by their opponents. The result is a highly polarised and emotive arena for debate.

As an approach to educational research, Hammersley suggests that the 'evidence-based or systematic research movement is highly instrumentalist': he questions the essential premise of this movement, that educational research should provide evidence upon which educational policy and schooling practice can be safely based. He questions whether practical problem-solving is actually the most important function of research and challenges the tendency for evidence-based research to operate on assumed value judgements about what *has been* done and what *should* be done:

> Yet it is clear that this involves value judgements which research cannot validate on its own. Equally, this instrumental view of the role of educational research may undermine effective practice because it privileges research evidence over evidence from other sources, including that arising from the experience of practitioners' (2001, p. 550).

Lather (2004) sees the 'evidence-based policy' movement as a neo-liberal phenomenon with a dominant managerialist orientation, imposing a government-sanctioned 'scientific method' model of research thinking on the academic community. She suggests that

> …the movement towards "evidence-based policy and research practice" oversimplifies complex problems and is being used to warrant government incursion into legislating scientific method (2004, p. 759).

Concerns about what constitutes valid and reliable evidence are expressed by Higgs and Keevy, who argue for the distinction between evidence (colloquial and/or scientific) on the one hand and opinion (untested views, prejudices, etc.) on the other. They found that 'evidence-based research predisposes research towards particular kinds of "scientific" evidence that are incommensurable with the accepted and tested understanding of evidence within educational practice' (2006, p. 16).

Apple has noted that false oppositions can be generated in research debates. In his introduction to a special issue of the *Review of Research in Education* (1995, p. xv), he comments that, while the research reported in that journal issue is largely of a qualitative nature, this should not be seen to diminish or invalidate quantitative research. He notes good and bad reasons for researchers to choose the qualitative route. Among the bad reasons he notes are 'trendiness' and 'fear of numbers'. Researchers using only qualitiative methods must demonstrate both the appropriateness of those methods and their utility for policy studies.

Ultimately, consideration of what constitutes 'good' educational research methodologies can be compromised by the assumptions that are associated with the term 'evidence-based'. Thus, the evidence-based or systematic-review school of thought tends to present research as a technology, 'simply a set of methods, skills and procedures applied to a defined research problem' (Usher, 1996, p. 9). By contrast, research constitutes a social practice and its significance is always dependent on its context: education researchers 'are not engaging in a neutral activity but rather in a politics of knowing and being known where power is never absent' (Usher and Scott, 1996, p. 180).

The research methods adopted in this study of educational policy are explicitly qualitative in nature and are chosen with due regard to the positions articulated by Hammersley and Usher above. Essentially, the approach adopted here is to engage with the practice of curriculum development as a phenomenon manifested in two particular forms:

- curriculum development as a creative activity in itself, insofar as the attempt is made to create new formulations of understanding, if not entirely new entities of educational configuration; and

- curriculum development as a social practice, wherein professionals (teachers, school management, educational researchers and suchlike) and non-professionals (including politicians, civil servants and administrators) interact, construct policy and shape practice.

The arts, evaluation and critique

Most educational evaluation projects as noted earlier, follow fairly standardised approaches, largely driven by a focus on outcomes measured in terms of impact on practice, and usually using some central quantitative data, generated though survey or similar fieldwork. This approach is a well-established and legitimate one, enabling decision makers to make pragmatic and fairly short-term decisions, and allowing for some measure of public accountability in strict 'value for money' terms, again largely in a short-term context. In other words, the value of such methodological approaches, blending quantitative with some qualitative measures, is essentially political, hopefully facilitating both the requirements of public accountability and the professional interests of participants. However, such evaluations tend to work on presuppositions, shared understandings of what is desirable and uncontested acceptance of the given starting points.

In this research project, by contrast, a more explicitly qualitative approach is adopted, centred on the process of curriculum development and its relationship to power, with a view to examining the essential nature of the process of curriculum development and its meaning for education policy in Ireland. The lenses of art-based critical practice and of critical discourse analysis are used to examine the experience of curriculum development in Ireland over the past twenty years.

The American art educationist, John Baldachinno recently noted:

In academia, the arts provide that perennial thrust by which the human knack for the creative, the odd, the critical and the imaginary preserves research and learning from the social scientific pervasion of positivist and instrumentalist standardisation (2008, p. 210).

In research terms, Baldachinno identified the '… need to balance empirical facticity against artistic specificity'. There is a tripod of perspectives for the artist's practice-based research: critique, the self and art making. The movement from critique into the self is the first and arguably the most important stage of research practice, where the insights generated by critique are internalised and the artist takes ownership of them, consciously or unconsciously. The resultant practice of the artist, and the work that emerges from that practice is merely one piece of evidence of a deeper engagement with ideas and possibilities, and not the only possible manifestation of such. The 'facticity' to which Baldchinno refers is a perception that tends to assume that what is evident *is* the reality, and most likely, the only possible reality.

Arts research is concerned more with understanding than with explanation – the concern for the residual meanings of artworks, that might be transferred to application in other contexts may be better interpreted and understood as 'the quest for understanding which allows us to see familiar things differently, rather than a quest for explanation which might allow us to see many things in their similarities' (Thompson, 2006, p.3). In similar manner, the present research project uses an auto-ethnographic narrative, incorporating elements of the crit, as a means of revealing an essential orientation of the curriculum development process under review.

This research perspective draws heavily on the concept of critique. The insights and perspectives of the arts or the innovative science laboratory can have significant influence on educational practice, according to Eisner (2004). Much of his work is based on the twin pillars of connoisseurship and criticism:

> If connoisseurship is the art of appreciation, criticism is the art of disclosure … Connoisseurship is private, but criticism is public. Connoisseurs simply need to appreciate what they encounter. Critics however, must render these qualities vivid by the artful use of critical disclosure (1985, p. 92-93).

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For Foucault, criticism – or critique – is crucial not simply as a research perspective but as a positioning of the self within the social order. Crucially, Foucault's (1978) understanding of critique differs from everyday usage of the term in that it demands the suspension of universal or generalised judgement:

> Critique does not have the premises of a thinking that conclusively explains: and this is what is to be done now. It must be an instrument for those who fight, resist, and who no longer want what is. It must be used in processes of conflict, confrontation and resistance attempts. It must not be the law of the law. It is not a stage in a program. It is a challenge to the status quo.

In adopting this statement by Foucault as a leitmotiv for a conference on *Art as Critique*, Gerard Raunig interpreted the term 'art' as close to the Greek word *techne*. Critique then involves two related and almost contradictory propositions: critique suspends judgement, and at the same time, critique means re-composition and invention (Raunig, 2008, p. 1). Raunig distinguishes between Kant and Foucault in their understanding of critique: whereas Kant was concerned with critique as 'knowing knowledge' and above all knowing the limits of knowledge, Foucault interprets the critical attitude as a transgression of precisely these limits, into a realm where no preordained law exists. Raunig suggests that '… what Marx and Engels called 'practical critical action' is already quite close to the Foucauldian concept of 'the critical attitude' in this emphasis on turning away from Kant's purely epistemological critical project' (p.3).

Raymond Williams shares common ground with Foucault in describing criticism and the act of responding to cultural works: 'what always needs to be understood is the specificity of the response, which is not a judgement but a practice' (1976, p 75-76). Habermas, by contrast, implicitly demands criteria beyond such 'specificity of response'. While Foucault sees criticism essentially as a practice of resistance (Mouffe, 2008, p. 1), Habermas argues that criticism should be geared towards normative judgements. For Habermas the purpose of critique is to question the very foundations of social and political hierarchy and to establish a critical distance from observed phenomena. However, a programme for action cannot be devised from such critique alone; Habermas identifies the need for a stronger normative theory, such as his theory of communicative action, for such a purpose (Butler, 2001).

Foucault sees no causal or consecutive relationship between critique and programme. As Butler puts it,

> (f)or Foucault, critique is "a means for a future or a truth that it will not know nor happen to be, it oversees a domain it would not want to police and is unable to regulate." So critique will be that perspective on established and ordering ways of knowing which is not immediately assimilated into that ordering function (2001, p. 2).

There is a clear tension between Foucault's conception of critique as a perspective that must refrain from saying 'this is what is to be done now', and Habermas's view of critique and discourse. Habermas (1990, 62) talks about the moral principle or the criterion for generalizing maxims of action, and advocates a co-operative process of argumentation.

Habermas views Foucault's concept of critique as being 'enmeshed in 'performative contradictions' while Foucault found that Habermas among others was engaged in 'enlightenment blackmail'. Essentially, what Foucault says about critique in his paper *What is enlightenment?* is that criticism can be no more than a 'historical investigation into events that have led us to constitute ourselves' – it cannot be universal and generalisable. What it can do is present us with the explanation of how we got here and present us with the possibility of being or doing something alternative. He refuses to try to define what such an alternative might or should be but describes the process as 'the undefined work of freedom' (in Rabinow, p. 46). Such a process is genealogical in its design and archaeological in its methods.

Hammersley (1997) notes that Habermas provides a perspective on discourse and purposeful critique that resonates with critical discourse analysis, although the Foucauldian influence is more frequently cited by CDA practitioners. The Habermas perspective resonates especially with the internal dynamic of 'the crit':

> Any meaningful expression … can be identified from a double perspective, both as an observable event and as an understandable objectification of meaning. … To grasp (and state) its meaning, one has to participate in some (actual or imagined) communicative action in the course of which the sentence is used in such a way

that it is intelligible to speakers, hearers and bystanders to the same speech community… (Habermas, 1990, pp. 23/4).

This also resonates with Eisner's (1985, p. 93) observation noted earlier, on the need for the critic to render the qualities of art vivid through 'the artful use of critical disclosure'. This shared understanding of and engagement with language is of significance when we come to look at curriculum policy documents that proclaim themselves to be either the outcome of consultation or actual elements in that consultation. Habermas further suggests that language usage itself is an appropriate focus of analysis, thus providing support for a CDA methodology:

> In one mode of language use, *one says what is or is not the case*. In the other, *one says something to someone else in a way that allows him to understand what is being said*. Only the second mode of language use is internally or conceptually tied up with the conditions of communication (1990, p. 240, emphasis in original).

Habermas is committed to a process of communicative action in which validity claims can be tested and redeemed through an authentic discourse. Such authentic discourse requires a collective consensus on the rules of engagement. The process of argumentation does not strive to achieve or make possible impartiality of judgement: rather it attempts to provide or enable discourse that is free from influence and is autonomous in its will-formation. The rules of discourse, according to Habermas (1990, p. 70), should neutralize imbalances of power and provide for equal opportunities to realise one's interests. In summary, an authentic discourse of true communication can only be achieved when all participants have established a common understanding of the procedures of the discourse and have committed to adhering to them.

These are demanding criteria against which to evaluate the discourses of public policy. They carry with them an implicit orientation to action based on the best understanding that collective consensus can generate. In this aspiration, Habermas is fundamentally at odds with Foucault, who is passionately sceptical of any 'project' of reform that might be seen to underpin discourse.

There is no accommodation between the unfinished enlightenment project of Habermas and the scepticism of postmodernists like Foucault. Lyotard's (1984) position is also

inherently opposed to Habermas's ambitious project, although perhaps not as intractably as Foucault's (see Steuerman, 1992). However, Bernstein (1991, p. 201) suggests that there are a number of ways in which they can supplement each other: an analysis of discourse that utilises an argument of both/and rather than either/or in respect of their distinct positions:

> … I do not think that we can any longer responsibly claim that there is or can be a final reconciliation, an *Aufhebung* in which all difference, otherness, opposition and contradiction are reconciled (1991, p. 8).

However, it is precisely this uncertainty that lies at the heart of Habermas's concept of communicative action. It echoes the words of Aristotle:

> Our account of this science [politics] will be adequate if it achieves such clarity as the subject matter allows ... for it is the mark of the trained mind never to expect more precision in the treatment of any subject than the nature of that subject permits; for demanding scientific proofs of a teacher of rhetoric is about as reasonable as accepting mere plausibility from a mathematician (*Ethics Nic.*, Bk 1, 1094 b12, b250).

It finds a contemporary resonance in Giddens who writes that 'the reflexivity of modernity operates, not in a situation of greater and greater certainty, but in one of methodological doubt' (1991, p. 84). Hogan (1995) in examining current educational discourses from a philosophical perspective, exemplifies this:

> the entire argument I am advancing here rests on the premise which holds not only that the unattainability of certainty is a basic feature of the human condition, but also that a wholehearted acknowledgement of this is *the most important of educational virtues* (p. 134).

Habermas expresses his conviction that 'a humane collective life depends on the vulnerable forms of innovation-bearing reciprocal and unforcedly egalitarian everyday communication' (1990, p. 45).

The critical discourse analysis of key curriculum documents that is introduced in this research project is consistent with both Habermasian and Foucauldian perspectives. Both these perspectives are further utilised in the application of an arts-based auto-ethnographic narrative, incorporating elements of 'the crit' model of evaluation.

Conclusion

This thesis is concerned with educational policy in the field of curriculum. It explicitly utilises qualitative and arts-based methodologies, despite the dominant tendency for policy-related research to incorporate at least an element of quantitative research. The two principal instruments to be used in the research are

- Critical discourse analysis which will focus on some key Irish curriculum policy documents published over the past twenty-five years; and
- Auto-ethnographic narrative, incorporating elements of 'the crit', in a series of critical encounters with and reflections on curriculum experiences.

The use of critique as a defining concept in the methodologies of this research is informed therefore by the philosophical interpretations of *critique* propounded by Foucault and by Habermas. These interpretations while profoundly different in many respects, have in common with each other an understanding of critique as a practice that can lead to territories unpredicted and unpredictable.

In the arts, Eisner (2001b) says that two qualities are essential for interpretation - sense (the feel) and reference (what the work refers to). By extension, this may also apply to the process of curriculum development as social practice. The 'sense' of what is being sought in the curriculum and the reference of that curriculum most particularly to national regulations, to classroom practice and to generalised norms such as examination procedures, is the frame within which this research project is presented.

CHAPTER TWO

Critical Discourse Analysis and Arts-based Narrative Research

Introduction

This is a study of an aspect of education policy. As such there is a more or less 'objective' body of data upon which to base research: specifically, the unprecedented amount of published statements of official curriculum policy that has been accumulated in Ireland over the past quarter century. The research perspective of a participant in the process that generated that data is more difficult to negotiate, however. In attempting to locate an appropriate perspective and to find a voice for the researcher, a number of influences, tendencies and sources have combined to produce the model that is formed here. The emergence of a research methodology for this project would make an interesting narrative in its own right.

Three currents have combined to reach this shore. First, the political dimension required a declarative statement of interest from the researcher. Second, the significance of text as such was central to interpretation, and within that, the evolution of discourse in curriculum policy was crucial. Third, the arts-sensibility of the researcher in his professional role of curriculum developer ran beneath the project.

This chapter describes the nature of and rationale for the specific research methods adopted for this study. Two research perspectives have been adopted, each utilising a study of 'the text'. Firstly, critical discourse analysis is the main research tool employed in this thesis for analysis of key curriculum policy documents published in Ireland over the past twenty five years. Secondly, an arts-based analysis, drawing upon elements of the crit and of auto-ethnography, is applied as a parallel narrative or counterpoint to this analysis. This two-track research approach reflects the dual concepts of curriculum development both as creative activity and as social practice. It is described visually in figure 1 below.
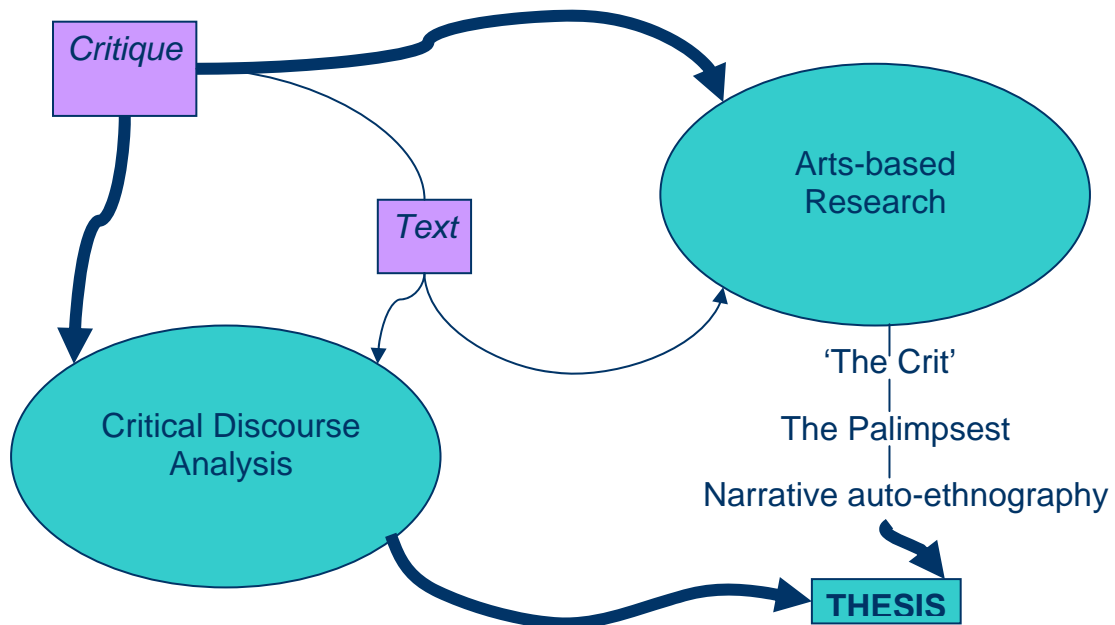
Figure 1: Research structure.

The research is centrally concerned with the process of critique. This manifests itself along one track through the application of critical discourse analysis in addressing landmark policy documents through the periods in question. Along a second research track, critique is addressed through the application of arts-based methodologies derived from the visual arts studio practice encounter known as 'the crit', using the palimpsest as working metaphor, and auto-ethnographic narrative as the vehicle of exposition. Both research tracks utilise written texts as the primary material for analysis.

Globalisation discourse and education research

Concepts of the knowledge economy and the learning society have been dominant in educational discourses in recent years, with particular reference to globalisation and to economic policies. International trends, often made manifest in organisations such as the

World Bank or the OECD, are seen to pervade the process of national educational restructuring. Ozga and Lingard (2007) reflect on the effect of globalisation on educational research. They talk about the negative, domineering effect of globalisation but also the positive potential:

> We understand education, including education policy, to be contradictory in its effects and possibilities: education is simultaneously a means of improving life chances and enriching life, as well as a process that maintains inequality and sustains conservative social formations. It has the potential to be both conservative and progressive, reproductive and transgressive (p. 66).

Michael Apple, speaking at a seminar in NUI Maynooth (June, 2008), similarly acknowledged that policies he would oppose ideologically can have certain positive effects in specific contexts.

Ozga and Lingard note the dominance of the conception of education as human capital development – 'the all pervasive globalised educational policy discourse today, around which national education policies appear to converge' (p. 68). They conclude that a dominant set of policy themes and processes expressed as globalised policy discourses has emerged, through which policy makers seek to reshape education systems. This has formed a globalised education policy field 'situated between global pressures and local vernacular education policy responses' (p. 69). These globalised policy agendas and processes interact with traditions, ideologies, institutions and politics that have developed on national terrains, resulting in 'vernacular education policy outcomes', local variations of global imperatives. The extent to which such local expression of global patterns has been true of Irish educational policy in general and curriculum policy in particular is a central point of enquiry in this thesis.

On education research, policy and politics, Ozga and Lingard contend that research policy

> … has been reframed by the desire of governments for clear and reliable evidence that can inform and support policy. Education research, which has been weakened by global criticism from powerful sources close to governments and is not securely positioned within the academy, is very vulnerable to reconfiguration in this mode, as a price of survival (2007, p. 77).

In the context of the foregoing discussion, the research methods chosen for this project are qualitative in nature yet they are directly engaged with policy implementation and educational practice. The study is an application of design studies in educational research as suggested by Gorard:

> Whereas the natural sciences are concerned with how things work and how they might be explained, design sciences are concerned more with how artefacts behave under different conditions (2006, p. 353).

In the context of the present study, the artefacts can be identified as curriculum policy statements and constructs, and their behaviour will be traced through a series of iterations through three decades.

One approach adopted for this thesis is to counter-pose the discourse of curriculum development, as a field of practice and latterly as a domain of academic study, with the discourse of education policy as manifested in official national documentation. The extent to which there has been a process of colonisation of one by the other is examined, a form of 'reverse takeover', whereby the rhetoric of curriculum change was adopted in the official literature in an apparent victory for the movement for curriculum reform. Whether the reality of curriculum change may have been smothered by the incorporation of that rhetoric into the conventions of standardised official orthodoxy is a recurring concern of this work.

The evolution of a discourse of education policy in Ireland since 1990 was facilitated by an unprecedented burgeoning in the range of official publications on education. A wave of reports and policy documents has been issued, with an initial focus on schooling matters in the 1990s but increasingly into the early years of the new century an explicit orientation towards higher education issues. The thesis explicitly addresses the body of official documentation concerned with curriculum policy and places it under scrutiny through the application of critical discourse theory.

Critical discourse analysis (CDA)

Critical discourse theory according to Fairclough (1995) comprises three dimensions of analysis – text, discourse practice and socio-cultural practice. While text can include any cultural artefact – a building, a piece of music, a media event – the analysis of the meaning of that text can be carried out from a common perspective. Fairclough proposes 'that "discourse" is use of language seen as a form of social practice, and discourse analysis is an analysis of how texts work within socio-cultural practice' (p. 7).

The social practice that Fairclough refers to can be seen at a number of levels in education policy-making and practice. Taylor applied critical discourse analysis (CDA) to the development of education policy in an Australian setting. Drawing on Fairclough (2001), Taylor identifies three elements of CDA: genres (interactions or ways of interacting), discourses (representations or ways of representing), and styles (identities or ways of being). Texts are analysed on the basis of semiotic and linguistic choices made in the writing and layout of policy documents including whole text organisation, clause combinations, grammatical and semantic features, and individual words.

Taylor stresses that what she calls 'policy activists' (often insiders to the system) 'can use CDA for social democratic ends in explicit ways, by utilising their understandings about language and power in their political and work practices' (p. 446). This has a particular resonance for the present writer who was a professional 'insider' within the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) for a significant part of the period under review, and who remains a policy activist as an active participant in, as well as commentator on, national curriculum policy formulation.

Luke (2002) uses the term *semiotic economies* to describe the ubiquity of discourse as an all-pervading element in shaping social relations, referring to the power of text in late capitalist societies. Such semiotic economies employ language, text and discourse as the principal modes of social discourse, of civic and political life and of economic behaviour and activity. The means of production and modes of information become intertwined in analytically complex ways (2002, p. 98).

Taylor (2004, p. 435) says that critical discourse analysis aims to explore the relationships between discursive practices, events, and texts, on the one hand, and wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes, on the other. In its exploration of how texts construct representations of the world, social relationships and social identities, CDA highlights how such practices and texts are ideologically shaped by relations of power.

Social analysis (what Taylor calls 'the external relations of the text') is combined with semiotic/linguistic analysis ('the internal relations of the text'). Policy texts use metaphor and rhetoric, for example, to influence the reader. Thus, in analysing Queensland education policy documents, Taylor instances the use of the discourse of 'uncertainty' and the rhetoric of 'globalisation'. While discourse analysis has been productively used in educational policy research (e.g. Ball 1990), CDA remains underused. The particular potential of CDA lies in its combination of linguistic analysis with social analysis.

Critical discourse analysis draws from Foucault the sense that discourses are

> practices that systematically form the objects about which they speak. Of course, discourses are composed of signs; but what they do is more than use these signs to designate things. It is this *more* that renders them irreducible to the language and to speech. It is this *more* that we must reveal and describe (Foucault, 1972, 54).

Ultimately these objects that are constructed through discourse become accepted as truths.

Discourse analysis, in attempting to excavate meaning from within and behind the formal language in use, is thus a rare research tool that is consistent with both Habermasian and Foucauldian perspectives. A key point of difference, of course, is that Foucault's perspective sees uncritical language usage as being destructive of the autonomy of selfhood. The 'truths' created through such normalising discourse are so internalised by those participating in the discourse that they become definitive moments of non-coercive discipline: in Foucault's terms, discourses become 'technologies of the self' (Foucault 1980). More assertively, Derrida notes that writing or texts in themselves, rather than

being a medium of expressing reality actually come to constitute the reality of things (MacLure, 2003).

Habermas in his earlier work rejects 'textualism' – the notion that all meaning resides within the text and that nothing exists beyond the text. Social analysis must deal with that which is beyond the text, even beyond meaning: 'the objective framework of social action is not exhausted by the dimension of … meaning' (Habermas 1977, p.361). According to Luke, however, within a CDA frame there is no space outside discourse, and meanings are constructed and contested at all stages in everyday life. Crucially, however, he notes that while language and symbols may have an apparently uncontested and shared meaning, 'all language has a *refractive* rather than a transparent effect, mediating, interpreting and reconstructing versions of the natural and social world, identity and social relations' (p. 19).

Apple agrees with Luke (1988, p. 28) that 'texts do not always mean or communicate what they say' and that any text is open to multiple readings. We must always be willing to 'read' our own readings of a text, to interpret our own interpretations of what it means (Apple, 2000, p. 58). However, these readings of a text, as presented by Luke and Apple, are more than literal readings of the words: they comprehend the context and 'habitus' within which the words are presented, approaching 'the objective framework of social action' to which Habermas refers.

At a later point in his work, Luke makes more explicit his broad view on methodological inclusivity. He refers to the binary divide in educational theory between progressives and behaviourists. He notes policy initiatives that are dependent on the adoption of scientifically proven methods and programmes, an approach based on the medical science research model. But, supporting the position expressed earlier (Chapter 1), he says that this in itself is a flawed reading of medical research – 'Modern epidemiology and medicine uses a broad range of methodologies, from case-based work, observational ethnographies and interviews to complex social statistical analyses' (2007, p. 90).

Challenging the singular, homogeneised and boundaried view of research culture, he explores the fluidity of movement between the research culture of the university and the policy culture of state education administration. As an academic turned administrator and back again, he gives an account of trying to relate Foucault and Habermas to the real life process of policy making. He found no simple or dominant pattern – a critical discourse analysis alone would fail to capture the essence of what he experienced as the 'emotional economy' of educational administration. He uses an arts-based metaphor to best express his experience as an academic engaging with policy implementation:

> To a newcomer, they were more like unpredictable musical riffs, presented with affective force, their effects greatly dependent on the gendered power, position and authority of speakers ... policy formation entails far more arbitrary play of discourse and truth, power and knowledge that I had anticipated, notwithstanding how it is justified in press releases, *Hansard,* or green papers, or how it is critiqued (p. 93).

Ultimately, Luke is calling for an integrated research agenda to inform policy and practice:

> … neither unreconstructed progressivism nor born again positivism will suffice. A critical educational project … can afford neither a purity of research uncontaminated by normative responsibility for what is to be done nor naive policy, based on pseudo-science and anecdote (p. 99).

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is understood and described by Fairclough (1989, 1992, a, b, c, 1993, 1995, 2001, 2003, 2008) in terms of its essential orientation and by Luke (1989, 1994, 2007) and Taylor (2004) with regard to its practical application to education policy discourse and practice. As noted earlier, Luke provides a particularly helpful model for this application. His professional experience in moving from the domains of educational policy management to academe mirrors the professional experience of this researcher. His description of his resultant stance as being that of 'a narrative of "in-between"-ness, a "halfie" ethnography' (2007, p.92) is perhaps not the most elegant construction but it captures the pragmatic stance of adjusting abstract theory to lived experience, and back again. His particular inclination to adopt and adapt the apparently contradictory positions of Foucault and Habermas with a view to constructing a lens through which to examine policy – and ultimately a tool to design and implement policy – is particularly appealing (1995, 2007).

Hammersley (1997), a sceptical but not entirely antagonistic observer, notes three possible foundation theories for critical discourse analysis. Firstly, he identifies orthodox Marxist theory and the 'critical theory' of the Frankfurt School. Classic Marxism located the proletariat as the determined vehicle of history. Adorno and his colleagues moved away from that position, identifying 20th century capitalism as a key alienating force that demands resistance, yet identifying no single liberating force, and indeed acknowledging the possible futility of such resistance. Secondly, Hammersley identifies what he terms 'decisionism', derived from the poststructuralist French school and the term itself from Habermas. Here one chooses one's position, a leap of faith as it were. This leap could be to the left or to the right or (as per Foucault) neither. Thirdly, and most persuasively, Hammersley suggests Habermas's universal pragmatics as an appropriate reference point for CDA. Habermas believes that communicative interaction is far more important than organised labour (pace Marx) in mediating human alienation and fulfilment. Political life should be designed on the basis of people coming together in an 'ideal speech' situation. From a CDA perspective, this might imply a privileging of one kind of speech, but Hammersley notes that the Habermas orientation is potentially very strong: he is surprised that CDA advocates do not make more explicit use of this formulation as a rationale for the process.

Other critics of CDA, some very virulently so, are found on the Marxist left. Jones and Collins (2007, 2004, Collins and Jones, 2006, Jones and Collins 2006) are highly critical of CDA and the 'language myth' it has created. In its purely linguistic sense, Jones notes that while communicative practices can indeed be as oppressive as any other practice, 'the contribution of particular communicative practices to the exercise of power and authority must not be oversimplified' (2007, p. 344). Jones says that for Fairclough and other such analysts, 'language myth' has become a social reality, and that 'the price we pay for accommodating this particular myth in our social philosophy is the mystification of social processes in general and communicative practices in particular' (p. 360).

Billig (2008a), like Jones and Collins, commented on the perceived lack of reflexivity in CDA. An interesting debate on the inherent values and utility of CDA (Billig 2008a, b, Martin 2008, van Dyjk 2008 and Fairclough 2008) ensued. At the conclusion of this extended debate, Billig suggests that the current economic conditions of academic life encourage jargon-filled, technical writing but that academics should resist the pressure to use heavy, nominal-based jargon, which is a temptation frequently too great for CDA practitioners to resist. Carleheden's position supports this call for clarity, and he cites Habermas (1991): '(j)ust those norms of action are valid to which all possibly affected could agree as participants in rational discussion'(2006, p. 525). Janks however asserts (1997, p. 341) that the strength of CDA is that its different frames of analysis can both generate new research questions and analyse data, while Liasidou (2008, p. 494) notes 'the fact that the conventional modes of validity and reliability cannot be applied in CDA' but that analysts must ensure that their results are capable of withstanding rigorous challenge and scrutiny. Codes (as per Bernstein) are culturally accepted frameworks of meaning that govern the responses of individuals in the gamut of social situations of daily life (Dickinson and Erben, p. 260) and in this context critical discourse analysis is a means of making explicit those codes that are being used in the dominant discourse of the day.

The evolution of Irish curriculum policy over the past quarter-century presents an interesting case for scrutiny in this context. The considerable extent to which the rhetoric of curriculum development in the eighties became the dominant discourse of curriculum policy in the nineties is an interesting study in itself. What is likely to be more interesting and valuable, however, is the extent to which that process of 'form(ing) the objects about which they speak' (Foucault 1972, p. 54) actually occurred in reality, as distinct from remaining simply at the level of rhetoric or aspiration.

Luke suggests that while there are many macro-treatments of the concepts of discourse in policy, there are few real applications of a detailed analysis:

> It is extremely risky to engage in the construction of texts of curriculum, education policy and research without some explicit reflexivity on how and whom we construct and position in our own talk and writing. For these reasons, a critical

sociological approach to discourse is not a designer option for researchers but an absolute necessity for the study of education in post-modern conditions (1995, p. 18).

Luke identifies seven keywords or concepts at the heart of CDA: text, discourse, inter-textuality, genre, subjectivity, hegemony and ideology. These inter-related concepts will inform the following analysis of the chosen curriculum texts.

Text can be simply understood as language in use (Luke, 1995, p.13) in a variety of settings. *Genre* is a recognition that different texts develop to serve institutional purposes or projects. Text types or genres can range from phone calls to websites, from documentaries to scientific essays and an almost infinite number of other types. All these comprise moments when social relations are articulated through language and semiotics. For the purposes of this study, however, the texts consist of policy statements and curriculum materials generated in the context of those policy statements, as well as the language of discourse employed by key policy makers and practitioners.

Discourse is formed by and made apparent in the recurrent statements and meanings across texts that mark out identifiable systems of meaning and fields of meaning and belief. The discourse of curriculum that has evolved over the period under scrutiny will be identified through the analysis of patterns of language utilised in official statements. *Inter-textuality* refers to the extent to which repeated and reiterated wordings, statements and themes appear in different texts. It has been described simply as 'the juxtaposition of different texts' (Bloome and Egan-Robinson, 1993, p. 305) but that simplicity masks a complex and contested zone of engagement.

Subjectivity refers to the role of the individual in respect of the discourse. CDA assumes that individuals do not have singular identities or fixed social, cultural or gendered characteristics. Subjectivities are constructed on a daily basis through the 'dynamics of daily life (Luke, 1995, p. 14), and in the case of curriculum discourse being examined here, the subjectivity refers mostly to the key audiences to whom the policy documents are addressed. A particular sub-group of interest within that general audience comprises

curriculum developers, teachers and policy makers whose professional work is devoted to the process of curriculum development at local, regional or national levels.

Gramsci's notion of *hegemony* has been used (Fairclough, 1992b) to describe the process whereby discourse establishes itself as 'common-sense'. This is a key focus of the current study, in attempting to track if and how certain concepts and values have come to dominate curriculum discourse. This concept of hegemony can also be seen as an instrument of *ideology* insofar as texts and discourses attempt to represent the social and natural worlds as uncontested and 'common-sense' interpretations within which essentially ideological concepts and orientations become embedded and, for the most part, remain unnoticed. The analysis of texts can highlight such ideological bias and in doing so, suggest alternative, contrasting or less-biased readings or interpretations so as to enable users to decode and demystify the text.

The underpinning rationale for the application of critical discourse analysis to recent Irish curriculum statements can be understood as a way to disrupt and interrogate the common-sense and hegemony of received wisdom of Irish curriculum policy. Again Luke (1995) has suggested three functions that CDA can carry, three purposes of the critique: firstly, to suggest alternative readings of any given text; secondly, to make transparent the devices being used in the construction of the text; and thirdly to differentiate between discourses in terms of their effect on the 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 1991) within which the text operates. These are informing principles behind the use of CDA as one lens of scrutiny in this study.

Narrative and interpretation in research

A second lens utilised in this study is that of an arts-based, auto-ethnographic narrative which employs elements of *the crit* as a methodology and the *palimpsest* as a metaphor.

The role and validity of narrative as a research tool is not unproblematic (Behar, 2008; Ceglowski, 1997; Silverman, 2007; Munro, 2007; Rogers, 2009). The 'detached voice of authority' (Behar, 2008) retains a tempting aura of security for the researcher. Munro says narratives are seductive but she is suspicious of their claim of explanatory power to

recount original experience (2007, p.488). While the use of narrative as a research tool acknowledges the social construction of knowledge, Bourdieu's warning of the 'biographical illusion' – that life is not run on straight lines, following a single plot – remains a potent source of caution. Munro looks for a meaning of narrative in research as beyond representation or metaphor: rather, she proposes narrative as a means to 'attune us to what it means to be human', in an ambiguous and uncertain life-world (p. 497).

Barone points out that Rorty, Habermas and Lyotard in their different ways acknowledge the importance of the story itself over the premium of factual objectivity (2007, p. 455). He raises a number of questions about narrative construction in the light of current retrenchment in attitudes towards research. Among these, he raises the question as to what are the ultimate purposes of educational narrative research. He suggests that rather than seeking to 'reduce uncertainty', which is the traditional orientation of 'gold standard' research, narrative research ought to 'lift the veil of conventionality' from the eyes of the reader, raising questions about 'the necessity and desirability of comfortable, familiar educational discourses and practices' (p. 465). Barone does not want to set up a counter-hegemony to the gold standard of quantitative and 'objective' research but instead, like Luke (2007), he wants a more ecumenic approach to research.

Elsewhere, Barone (2008, p.109) talks of the contrasting tropisms of centripetal and centrifugal forces in the reading of any text. There may continue to be a desire to reduce uncertainty but to understand how some texts operate requires an acceptance of ambiguity. He goes on to suggest that some arts-based texts like sociological, ethnographic or journalistic studies may have strong centripetal tropisms, leaning towards the promotion of an authorised or 'correct' version of events – e.g. summative evaluations. Or a text may offer what purports to be an authoritative version of auto/biographical or historical phenomena. These tend to promote certainty rather than ambiguity, and claim to be regarded as 'valid, literally true, trustworthy and (in one sense) useful.' (p. 110). But such texts may contain a variety of literary styles, connotative language, combined characters, allusions, flashbacks, tone shifts and so on – thus they can be seen as non-fiction, fiction or both. While in the past researchers have

found any sense of ambiguity a disreputable quality in their work, that is changing now and it has become 'an intriguing characteristic whose healthy presence in their accounts has not only been accepted as inevitable but openly celebrated as desirable and even useful' (p. 113) .

Paul Ricoeur (*Time and Narrative*, 1984) has noted 'the eclipse of narrative' in history writing. He acknowledges a common criticism of narrative theory, namely that stories are recounted, not lived, while life is lived, not recounted (1991a, p. 20). Against this position, he argues that in his own treatment of narrative understanding, while stories are indeed 'recounted', they are also lived in the mode of the imaginary. A story, according to Ricoeur, is comprised of various heterogeneous elements, but with three key features binding the narrative: the mediation performed by the plot between the multiple incidents and the unified story; the primacy of concordance over discordance in that story; and finally the competition between succession (how events succeed each other) and configuration (a sense of closure, the resolution of the plot).

Ricoeur asserts the essential creative and imaginative basis for narrative, the phronetic understanding as compared to the theoretical understanding of a plot. The concept of *phronesis*, the capacity and disposition to improve and change rather than describe, underpins his treatment of narrative. The recounting of the story itself is a 'second order discourse' which must be preceded by a phronetic, narrative understanding stemming from the creative imagination. Narrative models or genres proceed from a sedimented history whose genesis has been obliterated (1991a, p. 24). This concept of 'sedimented history' will be addressed again in Chapter 6.

Ricouer presents an essential justification for narrative as truth and it rests on a belief that allegedly objective narration, the chronology of events, does not capture the meaning of such succession and sequence. In narrative, the horizon of expectation (the future) and the horizon of experience (the past) confront one another and fuse together.

Aristotle's notion of emplotment (in *Poetics*) captures the sense of fable and plot, and according to Ricoeur this emplotment is 'the common work of the text and the reader' (p. 27). Ricoeur states specifically that 'the sense or the significance of a narrative stems from the intersection of the world of the text and the world of the reader. The act of reading thus becomes the critical moment of the entire analysis' (1991a, p.26). This is directly comparable to the autonomy of the viewer in visual art, and the transfer of ownership from the artist to the audience.

Ricouer claims that the difference between life and fiction is that we can become our own *narrator*, in imitation of the narrative voices of literary genres, without being able to become *author* of our own lives. He suggests the following 'chain of assertions':

> self-knowledge is an interpretation; self-interpretation, in its turn, finds in narrative, among other signs and symbols, a privileged mediation; this mediation draws on history as much as it does on fiction, turning the story of a life into a fictional story or a historical fiction' (1991b, p. 188).

He further relates the role-distinction as between narrator and author in his work *Oneself as Another*:

> By narrating a life of which I am not the author as to existence, I make myself its co-author as to its meaning (1992, p. 162).

Polkinghorne is concerned with the validity threats in narrative research. She notes some sources of disjunction (2007, p. 480) including the limits of language alone to capture the complexity and depth of experienced meaning. Similarly, she questions the capacity of reflection alone to engage with the layers of meaning behind and beneath awareness. She also identifies as a problem the resistance of people for social or personal reasons to reveal fully the entire complexities of the felt meanings of which they are aware.

A further danger of narrative research is identified by Bolton (2006, p. 204), who warns that 'our stories can only too easily be essentially self-affirming and uncritical. Or even worse they are censoring tools: "cover stories"'. A result of such self-protection is that narratives may be inclined not to explore sensitive issues, but instead restrict themselves to areas of comfort, expressions of what we would like to be. In conclusion, she says the

perennial professional or educational challenge is to gain access to, and articulate, what we know, think, believe and remember.

In the specific context of education studies, extensive work has been carried out in recent years in relation to teachers' stories and narratives (Ball and Goodson 1985; Sikes, Measor and Woods, 1985; Goodson and Hargreaves, 1996; Goodson and Sikes 2001). In terms of education policy studies and research approaches, Goodson (2005, p. 5) asserts that 'we have to understand the personal and biographical if we are to understand the social and political. This is nowhere more true than in the relevance of personal biography in the choice of research focus and method'.

The concern with what might be regarded as self-justification or self-indulgence underpins much of the unease with which researchers may approach narrative research (Knowles and Promislow, 2008; Finley, 2008). Ricoeur (1991a, p. 33) addresses this explicitly. Through the imaginative variations of our own ego, he suggests, we can obtain a narrative understanding of ourselves, escaping the apparent choice between sheer change and absolute identity. This can allow us to escape narcissism, the ego of the subject. Arts-based research encompassing such domains as action research, Socratic dialogue and, as in this case, narrative research can enable effective awareness and exploration. Ultimately, as Polkinghorne concludes, 'the confidence a reader grants to a narrative knowledge claim is a function of the cogency and soundness of the evidence-based arguments presented by the narrative researcher' (2007, p. 484/5).

'The crit' as critique; the palimpsest as metaphor
The critical encounter, the studio critique or 'the crit' as it is commonly known, is a pedagogic and critical forum wherein typically a student artist or designer presents his or her work to peers and tutors. The student's presentation at the crit draws upon his or her trajectory of creation: the sources, issues, influences and intentions through which the emergent art has developed. This presentation is usually a blend of personal and technical reflections with which the audience of peers and tutors subsequently engage. The presentation typically comprises disparate items – photographs, sketches, notes,

memorabilia and sundry pieces of evidence that have shaped the intentionality of the artist. This element of the crit is conceptualised in the present thesis as the presentation in Chapter 6 of an auto-ethnographic narrative, drawing on personal texts written by the researcher at different stages of his professional life.

For the purposes of the present research project, some features of the crit are used as a frame for and a lens through which to examine the process of curriculum development with which the author has been concerned over the past thirty years. Specifically, the object of the crit is conceived as a personal narrative of the author's own experiences and rationalisations over a time period that encompassed changes both in his own professional context and in that of the various educational environments in which he has been working.

There are two essential elements of a crit. The first is the selection, organisation and presentation by the artist of his or her work, its trajectory and the dilemmas it presents in the process of creation and execution. The second is the engagement of the audience of peers in discussion of the work and its success or otherwise. The combination of these two elements provides the longer term impact of the encounter on all the participants – on the central artist obviously, but also on those others who have engaged in the discourse. The crit is thus a pedagogic and formative process rather than a judgemental forum, a critique rather than an evaluation as discussed in Chapter 1 above.

It is the first of these two elements of the crit that has been adopted as a model for the present research: that is, the selection, organisation and presentation of sources that trace the evolution of the work under review. Specifically in terms of this thesis, this element can be identified in the auto-ethnographic narrative contained explicitly in Chapter 6, and implicitly in the study described in chapters 3, 4 and 5.

An initial orientation for this research was towards the enactment of a full crit, incorporating the second element described above, in which an audience of peers would engage with the work of other prominent curriculum developers. However, as the

research evolved, the self-reflective subtext of the work became more prominent. In particular the metaphor of the palimpsest, the tracings of earlier impressions beneath the visible text, became a potent and recurring image in the documentary analysis which is central to the research. This issue grew in prominence within the research to such an extent that it was decided to restrict the treatment of the crit only to the first of its two constituent elements. The influence of Ricouer's work (1984, 1991a, 1991b, 1992) in relation to narrative and identity, and in particular the evocative concept of sedimented history, combined with the already established arts-based research perspective, was a key factor in reorienting the epistemological position towards that of auto-ethnographic narrative research. Within this approach, the artist-centred first element of the crit – the 'first turn' as it is called – has been retained, rather than the interactive second element which would constitute a separate research activity (but see Chapter 8 below for implications and possibilities in this regard). Using Ricoeur's analysis of 'oneself as another', however, there is also a sense in which such an interactive engagement is present in reflecting on different iterations of the same person over a period of some thirty years

In analysing a series of authentic crits in design education in Canada, Oak (2004) noted that in all the crits, designed objects were positioned as points of transition between personal agency and the imagined needs of others. This is similar to the 'boundary object' in activity theory, which acts both as a point of engagement and as a potential moment of change or innovation within or between activity systems or communities (Tuomi-Grohn, Engestrom & Young, 2003; Engestrom, 2001) The research approach under discussion for the present project attempts to address curriculum design as an art object that similarly constitutes a transition between personal agency (of the curriculum planners in general as well as the researcher himself in his previous and current roles) and the imagined, perceived or documented needs of others (learners, teachers, policy-makers and the wider population).

The crit itself is notoriously difficult to define or describe. Central to the process of the crit is that the object or created artefact does not of itself constitute the full meaning of its

creation: 'it is in relationship to social interaction, to talk, that artefacts become catalysts for the presentation of the self, and through the self, the representation of others (Oak, 2004). This can be a traumatising, if cathartic, process (see Finkel, 2006, for some of the traumas associated with the crit). James (1996, p. 153) conceives of the crit as the final phase of studio instruction where art objects act as interactants in discussion and analysis, as the works themselves help structure conversations' (p. 179). Soep emphasises that the crit should not comprise a judgemental verdict. It should be marked by spontaneity, empathy and equality, and comprise description, problem orientation, and perhaps most intriguingly, a commitment to provisionality. 'Arts education research is exactly like arts learning experience: deeply personal and absolutely social, at the same time' (Soep, 2004, p. 682). The crit offers an opportunity for the artist/designer to project his or her work as a researcher as well as an arts practitioner, to set the parameters of the critique and to challenge accepted authorities (Blair, 2006; Percy, 2004).

Barrett, reflecting on a professional lifetime of art education and criticism, urges concentration on the implied meanings of the work regardless of intent. 'I generally deemphasize judgement in favour of interpretation. Judgement without interpretation is irresponsive and irresponsible' (Barrett 2004, p. 746). He decries intentionalism – what the artist had intended or sought to do, as distinct from the visible work itself – as distracting and irrelevant. Roth (1999) similarly identifies this notion of intentionalism as a source of conflict or division within the construct of the crit.

Elkins (2001) compares the sterility and conformism of conventional assessment methods with the potential richness of the crit as practiced in the visual arts:

> Critiques are an entirely different matter. They are unbelievably difficult to understand and rich with possibilities. All kinds of meaning, all forms of understandings can be at issue … But the price critiques pay for that richness is very high. Critiques are perilously close to total nonsense. They just barely make sense – they are nearly totally irrational (p. 166).

The perceived reliability of what is termed 'evidence-based research' does not sit easily with such an ill-defined practice that 'barely makes sense'. However, as a means of locating the meaning of developed work and practice, whether in the arts or in more

general educational practice, the value of the provisional transactions that constitute the crit will be exploited in this research project. The project is underpinned by a perspective that Elkins (p.189) neatly summarises like this: 'Sense is something that has to be made. It does not exist naturally'. The crit as practiced in art colleges aims to function in that sense-making manner; and so does this thesis, in terms of making sense of the process of curriculum reform that has occurred in Ireland over the past quarter century.

Conclusion

A blended utilisation of methodologies has shaped the present research. Thus, elements of critical discourse analysis are utilised to engage with some key curriculum policy documents of the last quarter century. This CDA approach is complemented by a perspective drawn from arts based-research practice as articulated by Elliot Eisner, as manifested in auto-ethnographic narrative and as exemplified in the practice of 'the crit' in visual art and design education. The engaged role of the researcher in the process being examined is captured and controlled in the overlaying of these research lenses, one upon the other, each countervailing the other in respect of objectivity and insight. Common ground between these perspectives is provided through a shared form of research object, *the text*.

The next three chapters present a sequence of three 'moments' in the evolution of curriculum policy in Ireland over the past quarter century: the mid-1980s, the mid-1990s and the mid-2000s. These moments are examined in respect of some key policy documents published, analysed through a CDA lens. The documents for analysis can be described as a 'genre chain' (Taylor, 2004) in the sense that they constitute an inter-connected historical trajectory of policy evolution with respect to curriculum at post-primary level in Ireland. The moments and the key documents are set out as follows:

Moment One: Early Positions

     a. CEB (1984) *Issues and Structures in Education*

This was the first consultative document of the newly established Interim Curriculum and Examinations Board (CEB). Its main focus was on post-primary schooling and it included

an innovative overview of curriculum possibilities at junior cycle (lower secondary) with some more generalised thinking at senior cycle.

b. CEB (1987) *In Our Schools: a framework for curriculum and assessment*

The final report of the CEB, this document set out the recommendations of that board to the Minister for Education, in the context of the anticipated statutory board which was the replace the Interim CEB. In the event, shortly after this report was published a change in government led to an interregnum in curriculum politics before the CEB was replaced in 1987 with a new body, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).

Moment Two: Established Positions

c. Ireland (1992) *Education for a Changing World*

In the wake of a report from OECD on Irish education, the government published a Green Paper on education, a consultative document which reflected the priorities of a new Taoiseach and a new Minister for Education. This document included some significant and controversial ideas in relation to curriculum which provoked widespread debate.

d. NCCA (1993) *Curriculum and Assessment Policy Into the New Century*

Prepared as a comprehensive statement of overall curriculum and assessment at primary and post-primary levels by the NCCA, this document served both as a response to the Green Paper (1992 above) and as an input to the emerging White Paper which would articulate a formal government policy on education. It set out a formal statement of curriculum intent, with particular focus on structures to accommodate diverse learning needs.

e. Ireland (1995) *Charting Our Education Future*

The White Paper of government policy was the culmination of an extensive period of consultation, of a series of reports and commentaries on Irish education and of a period of unprecedented discussion and engagement with education partners. As a White Paper, it was a formal statement of the state's policy with some major positions adopted that signalled significant changes in the shape of Irish education, and was followed by important operational developments, including a raft of innovative legislation.

Moment Three: Future Positions

    f. NCCA (2004) *Overview: Proposals for the Future of Senior Cycle Education in Ireland*

    g. NCCA (2005) *Proposals for the Future Development of Senior Cycle Education in Ireland*

Some ten years after the White Paper and the concurrent restructuring of senior cycle education that occurred in the mid-1990s, the NCCA concluded a major process of review of the nature and structure of senior cycle education through this two-part advisory document, which sparked considerable debate and some controversy. The proposals set out a vision for future curriculum policy in the context of a learning society.

These and some related documents are examined in respect of the key concepts apparent in the texts, the curriculum priorities that each document contained and the ideological or philosophical orientation that each displayed. While the curriculum frame within which they were presented included primary education and the junior and senior cycles of post-primary education, a particular emphasis will be placed on the treatment of post-primary curriculum and, within that, of senior cycle policy.

These three chapters are then followed by another which looks back over the same period of time through an auto-ethnographic lens. In that chapter, a different set of texts will be used as research material, texts written by the present researcher at roughly contemporaneous moments to the earlier official texts. These texts will be presented as an artist would present sources, sketches, drafts and maquettes during a crit. A subsequent chapter will review the evolution of curriculum discourse over the past three decades from the platform provided by these two processes of critical discourse analysis and auto-ethnographic reflection.

CHAPTER 3

Three Moments: One – Early Positions

Introduction

Curriculum development as a professional activity in Ireland was rather under-developed until the 1970s. There was very little substantive engagement with curriculum policy at the level of public debate. A Council of Education had been appointed in 1950 and reported on *The Curriculum of the Secondary School* in 1960. That report gave an unqualified statement of support to the existing curriculum, to the effect that

> the existing conditions regarding the basic curriculum for recognised secondary schools, and the approved courses for junior and senior pupils are considered reasonable by the Council (1960, p. 258).

The report presented an essentially elitist view of secondary education: 'if secondary education were to be universally available free for all, the incentives to profit by it would diminish and standards would inevitably fall' (p. 252). No concerted public debate had taken place on the nature of the curriculum at second level in the years since the publication of that report.

The introduction of free post-primary education in the late 1960s and the introduction of a new primary curriculum in 1971, after the abolition of the former primary certificate examination, brought the issue of curriculum to the fore. The child-centred orientation of the new primary curriculum was itself a watershed. It constituted a major shift of focus and of understanding of the teaching and learning process. The introduction of free post-primary education and the raising of the school-leaving age to 15 years changed the profile of the second level school population dramatically.

However, the relatively radical ideas of the new primary curriculum, including its child-centred approach, had little impact on the post-primary curriculum. The dominant discourse in relation to curriculum issues was that of syllabus and examination. This is perhaps best captured by the 1980 *White Paper on Educational Development* which acknowledged the need for a deeper and more imaginative treatment of curriculum but presented its chapter on 'School curriculum at second level' as follows:

For the purposes of this chapter, however, curriculum will be taken to mean simply the range of subjects, with their individual syllabi, that are approved for study at a particular level (p. 43).

At post-primary level, some initiatives took place in the late 1960s and early 1970s to address the curriculum implications of the new primary curriculum, the raising of the school leaving age to fourteen (later to fifteen) years, the abolition of the Primary Certificate examination and related changes in the structures of Irish education. The exploration of the comprehensive ideal in education led to the establishment of schools with a specific brief to develop this form of education. Two such schools were St. Patrick's Comprehensive School, Shannon and Ballyfermot Vocational School in Dublin. The appointment of principals to these schools - Diarmaid Ó Donnabháin in Shannon, Anton Trant in Ballyfermot - was made with the specific remit of developing new curriculum models. From that school-based initiative grew two local curriculum development agencies: the Curriculum Development Unit (CDU) in Dublin and the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) in Shannon, within each of which a series of curriculum development projects grew in the early to late 1970s (Trant, 2007, p. 40; Ó Donnabáin 1998, p. 40).

Around the same time (1971), the Irish Association for Curriculum Development (IACD) was established. The IACD sought to generate debate and professional discourse on the topic of curriculum through various meetings, seminars, conferences and most significantly through its journal *Compass*. The IACD also devoted considerable energies to the formulation of a proposal for the establishment of an independent agency at national level which would be responsible for curriculum and assessment policy and procedures. Following the initial announcement of the intention to establish such a board by the then Minister for Education (Boland, 1981), the IACD organised a specific conference on this issue and subsequently drafted a set of policy proposals (IACD 1983). This was submitted to all the political parties and published in 1984 (IACD 1984).

While these and associated initiatives remained a marginal activity in the context of the national education system, they generated a level of interest and a constituency of support

that manifested itself in political terms by the early 1980s. By that stage, the two major opposition parties in the Oireachtas, Fine Gael and Labour, had adopted policies to establish a statutory body, separate from the Department of Education, with responsibility for curriculum and assessment matters. In contrast the largest political party, Fianna Fáil which had been in government since 1977, favoured the establishment of a non-executive 'Curriculum Council to advise the Minister on curriculum matters in relation to second-level curricula and syllabi' (Ireland, 1980, p. 48), together with a strengthened executive role for the Curriculum Unit within the Department of Education (p. 61).

The momentum for change in Irish curriculum policy was shaped by contrasting international pressures. The curriculum development movement in Ireland had been highly influenced by the initiatives sponsored by the Schools Council in England (Skilbeck, 1990) and especially by the work of Lawrence Stenhouse (1975). This tradition of curriculum development prioritised the professional autonomy of the teacher and the capacity of schools to respond to locally identified needs. Yet this international practice was already undergoing substantial revision within a newly dominant political ideology, epitomised by the advent to power in the UK of Margaret Thatcher and in the US of Ronald Reagan. The disestablishment of the Schools Council and its replacement by the less autonomous Schools Curriculum Development Committee (SCDC) in England and Wales, was one indicator of the retrenchment of educational policies (McWilliams, 1983). In the USA the landmark report *A Nation at Risk* was published in 1983, setting an agenda of 'anti-progressive' education with an emphasis on basic skills and less devolution of autonomy to schools (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). The 'internal affairs' of educational reform were being replaced by the 'external relations' of change on the international scene, as the professional power of educator groups as drivers of reform was replaced by externally generated political agendas (Goodson, 2004, p. 22). The new curriculum structures being promoted in Ireland were still couched in the rhetoric of the internal change developers but reflected a more overt corporate structure in terms of power and control. An influential model for the emerging curriculum structures was that of the Scottish Consultative Committee on the

Curriculum (SCCC), an advisory body providing a national framework for curriculum practice (McNicholl, 1983).

After a series of general elections in 1981 and 1982, a coalition government of Fine Gael and Labour was eventually established with a secure majority in the Dáil after the election of November 1982. At an early point in her ministry, the new Minister for Education, Gemma Hussey TD announced her intention to establish an independent Curriculum and Examinations Board. A special conference was organised by the IACD in response to this announcement in November 1983. The chairman of the association, Henry Collins, identified five key issues that were of concern to IACD in planning the conference and which capture the state of expectation of the burgeoning community of curriculum developers at the time:

> … the role of the teacher in the system, the type of system which would best facilitate curriculum development, the accreditation of courses and the maintenance of educational standards, the relative merits of central and regional administration, and the cost effective use of resources (Collins, 1983, p. 8).

The Interim Curriculum and Examinations Board was finally launched on 23 January 1984 (Hussey 1990, p. 89). While the Board was an appointed body, as distinct from a representative body of nominees, there were a number of designated bodies with whom the Board was obliged to liaise and a further set of consultative bodies who had right of consultation. The Board was committed to an extensive process of consultation and it established a series of committees encompassing a wide representation from the major education partners. Within nine months, its first deliberations were ready for publication.

Of particular interest for the purposes of the present research are two aspects of the new body's work. Firstly, the extent to which the curriculum agenda it followed was influenced by earlier work in the field of curriculum development, notably through the pilot projects devised by the Curriculum Development Unit (CDU) in Dublin and the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) in Shannon, will be examined. Secondly, the curriculum principles and priorities it enunciated will be identified and tracked through the subsequent evolution of policy. This chapter examines in some detail two important

documents published by the Interim Curriculum and Examinations Board (CEB): *Issues and Structures in Education* (1984) and *In Our Schools* (1986).

Issues and Structures in Education

In retrospect, the publication of *Issues and Structures* marked a watershed in curriculum discourse in Ireland. For the first time, curriculum policy was expressly presented as an issue for public engagement. The consultative process was manifested not just in the publication of and responses to a self-described 'consultative document' but was also expressed through a series of public meetings, organised at regional centres throughout the country. In its own right, this process marked a significant development in Irish public, and specifically education, policy-making.

The document itself is a short one, consisting of twenty eight A5 size pages, with two appendices contained in a further ten pages. The language is simple, with a minimum of jargon; the appendices address some particular technical issues in relation to assessment, and an extended and discursive glossary of terms is provided.

The issues are unfolded in a sequence of six very brief chapters (the longest of which is six pages) and two appendices. A two-page introduction (Chapter One) is provided by the Chairman of the Board, Edward Walsh. This is the only first-person voice recorded in the publication; there is no input from the Minister, though there is in the Introduction a generous acknowledgement of her interest and support.

Chapter 2, *Policy Issues* consists of a list of twenty six issues addressed in alphabetical order, ranging from 'assessment' to 'work ethic'. Each of these issues is treated in a brief paragraph, most consisting of three or four lines. The issue that is afforded the greatest length is 'change'; fifteen lines are devoted to this concept, noting a number of areas where change is likely to be necessary and pondering as to how best a climate for change can be created. Other issues to which a slightly greater emphasis is given are 'Leaving Certificate' (11 lines), and 'Assessment' (8 lines).

The selection of policy issues is clearly influenced by the original terms of reference (CEB, 1986) of the CEB. Thus for example, it seems that such issues as 'curriculum continuity', 'flexibility in curricula', 'international baccalaureate' and 'personal development' appear in the policy issues chapter because they were specifically noted in the original brief. The treatment of many of these issues is cursory at best:

- *Curriculum continuity*: The Board believes that formal education should be designed as a continuum (p. 9).
- *Flexibility in curricula*: The Board endorses the view that school programmes should take account of local needs and interests and recognises the need for assessment and certification procedures compatible with this objective (p.9).
- *International Baccalaureate*: The Board has not yet had an opportunity to consider the relevance of the International Baccalaureate to Irish needs (p. 9).
- *Personal development*: The Board endorses the view that the curriculum and its teaching should make adequate provision for the personal development of the individual student (p.10).

The chapter in general provides a fairly bland and tentative treatment of policy issues, containing little of substance or ideological commitment. Perhaps the three most significant positions adopted were the identification of the need for change, the involvement in assessment of teachers as part of their professional work and the need to accommodate vocational preparation courses within a senior cycle curriculum framework.

The commitment to consultation is noted as a particular process to which the CEB committed itself. This was a novel and innovative concept in education – indeed in public policy of any ilk – at the time.

Chapter 3 is entitled *Aims of Education* but rather than proposing such, the Board 'invites the public to join it in a discussion leading to the formulation of such a statement' (p. 12). The chapter does propose a methodology for this process, represented as 'a continuous experiment in the meshing of gears' (p. 13) as between three gear tracks – aspiration, context and constraints. Finally, the chapter proposes a brief statement of aims as a basis for policy and action in the short term:

> The general aim of education is to contribute towards the development of all aspects of the individual including aesthetic, creative, cultural, emotional,

intellectual, moral, physical, political, social and spiritual development for personal and family life, for working life, for living in the community and for leisure (p.14).

Chapter 4, *Second-level Education - Junior Cycle*, was to become the signature chapter of the document. This being the first publication of the new board, the CEB became identified with the radical ideas contained in this chapter. The number and variety of curriculum development projects that had been initiated in some post-primary schools was acknowledged:

> Some of these projects are co-ordinated by curriculum development units and centres or by the inspectorate of the Department of Education. Others are school-based and have little or no support from outside agencies (p. 16).

Three underlying needs were identified for the development of a new curriculum framework at junior cycle:

- a broader and more balanced core curriculum with an increased emphasis on skills and processes;
- a curricular structure that is sufficiently flexible to recognise and accommodate curriculum initiatives at school and regional level;
- assessment procedures that are determined by the aims and objectives of the curriculum (p. 16).

The chapter proposed a curriculum framework for the junior cycle consisting of a 'core', obligatory for all pupils and 'additional contributions', which would be optional experiences to be deployed as appropriate. This structure was represented graphically as a 'wheel', the inner core of which contained the range of experiences that would comprise the content of the educational core. The outer ring of the wheel contained the additional contributions. The wheel itself was segmented into eight categories (see appendix 1) each segment radiating from the centre out through the core into the Additional Contributions.

The fifth chapter entitled *Second-level Education - Senior Cycle* is shorter and less specific than that dealing with junior cycle issues. It sets out some 'general considerations' that should inform policy development in this area, in particular:

> The worth, status and general acceptability of the existing Leaving Certificate as a basis for development should be recognised. Change should be of an evolutionary nature and the curriculum structures which facilitate this should allow for a diversity of provision to meet a diversity of interests, aptitudes and needs (p. 21).

Some sketchy options of what might constitute a senior cycle provision were suggested, including an expanded Leaving Certificate, Vocational Preparation Programmes, Foundation Programmes for those re-entering education, and Continuation Programmes for those who might wish to take a specialised career-oriented course on completion of the senior cycle. The concept of mobility at senior cycle was stressed, including a modular system with linked equivalency for accreditation and a common national certificate for all students who would complete any of the possible options (p. 23). The overall tone of this chapter is very tentative and aside from a general commitment to mobility, no specific structures are proposed.

The penultimate chapter in the publication is *Assessment and Certification*. This chapter outlines the strengths and weaknesses of the current system of public examinations noting that '(i)t could be argued that until recently the advantages of the public examination system outweighed its disadvantages' (p. 25).

It suggests three grounds for change in the public examinations system: *democratic grounds* – the need for autonomy for individual schools and teachers in their professional activity; *egalitarian grounds* – the need to ensure that life prospects for all school leavers are equalised as much as possible; and *comprehensive grounds* – the need to provide educational experiences that are not confined to the liberal classical academic subjects of learning. Again, reference is made to a number of pilot projects that 'highlight the possibilities and problems which are inherent in such change'.

The final chapter is *Some Operational Issues for the Board* and this simply consists of a list of activities that the Board intended to carry out in the subsequent fifteen months. One of the ten items thus listed reads:

> To establish linkages with the main developments in curriculum which have been taking place during the past decade in both the junior and senior cycles of post-primary education; to identify what contribution these might make to meeting identified curriculum needs and, in particular, to consider their relevance to the formulation of a Board position on new modes of assessment and certification procedures (p. 27).

In Our Schools:

Issues and Structures was the first publication of the Interim CEB: *In Our Schools; a framework for curriculum and assessment* was, procedurally[2], its last. The ground covered by *In Our Schools* was essentially the same as that of the earlier publication, but rather than being a consultative document, this was now a formal statement of recommendations and policy advice. *In Our Schools* was the seventh publication in the CEB series of ten consultative or discussion documents, a remarkable rate of productivity at the time, when official education publications were few and infrequent.

The presentational style of the report is very similar to that of the earlier document. Like *Issues and Structures*, it is printed on A5 paper with a cover format that represented the house style developed by the CEB: a grey cover dominated by a large reproduction of the chevron logo adopted at an early stage by the Board. The presentational style of CEB documents, while appearing quite conservative and unremarkable some quarter-century after publication, was quite significant at the time. There was no culture of publication in official education circles: Department of Education documents mostly consisted of circular letters; only specialist committee reports were regularly published and these tended to be presented in a dry and unadventurous format. The CEB by contrast, placed some priority on high-quality publication, accompanied by high-profile launches: one of the first committees to be established by the CEB was its Publications Committee and professional designers were contracted to oversee publications, from newsletters to curriculum documents. In the three years of its existence, the CEB had created three lines of publication - a sequence of newsletters issued to all schools and various education interests, a series of discussion documents engaging with particular curriculum areas, and a series of consultative documents dealing with overarching policy issues. *In Our Schools* was part of this latter series that commenced with *Issues and Structures*. The professional image projected by the CEB publications was characteristic of the ethos of its chairman

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[2] *In Our Schools*, published in March 1986 was the final report of the Interim CEB before the anticipated establishment of a statutory board later that year. In fact, three further publications, dealing with senior cycle curriculum policy, with mathematics education and with science and technology education, were issued by the CEB before the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), an advisory non-statutory body, succeeded it in 1987.

and the source of some resentment within the Department of Education (Murphy, *Irish Times,* 1986).

Like *Issues and Structures*, *In Our Schools* was a short document, comprising forty-five pages, with a further eighteen pages devoted to seven appendices. An introduction from the Chairman was followed by seven chapters. The titles and sequencing of these chapters captured the register of the report. Chapters on the school and education, the curriculum in general were followed by chapters on the curriculum at primary level, at junior cycle and at senior cycle. A dedicated chapter on assessment and certification was followed by a short final chapter on a strategy for development.

In its structure and content, it invites direct comparison with the earlier report published less than two years previously. The earlier report was almost staccato in its presentation, with many issues introduced as short paragraphs, essentially little more than extended captions, describing rather than resolving policy issues. The chapters in *In Our Schools* are presented in continuous prose which, while still brief (no chapter is longer than seven pages), set out in simple language a policy position in respect of selected issues, but rarely digging deeper into the ramifications of such top-level policy positions.

The seven brief chapters are prefaced by an Introduction from the Chairman which is again, the only personalised voice in the document. This is followed by an Introduction in which the work of the Board is described as covering three phases, from a concern with general curriculum and assessment policy, to more focused treatment of specific curricular issues and finally to structured engagement with policy parameters within identified areas of the curriculum.

While the introduction is presented simply as a technical overview of the work processes of the Board, it indicates a certain educational and managerial approach: the engagement with 'big' strategic issues initially, followed by layered sequences of deeper engagement with the operational issues. The Introduction identified three features of the work of the CEB:

- the involvement of a diverse set of interests and expertise in the committees set up to address curriculum issues;

- the identification of some generic concerns – specifically continuity from primary to post-primary levels and the development of assessment modes consistent with the curriculum – to inform all the work;

- the initiation of a consultative process designed to facilitate the formulation of education policy.

In both its strategy of work and its prioritising of certain features associated with the work, the chapter is revealing of important aspects of the CEB. The sequenced phasing of the Board's work, perhaps most vividly encapsulated in the concept of 'sunset-committees'[3], embodied the logic of an engineering approach to curriculum planning, a phased and sequential approach to solving problems and progressing to the next phase of problems, until ultimately all problems are resolved. Implicit in this approach is a bounded concept of curriculum development, a sense that a new and 'better' curriculum framework can be established which could achieve realisation through national mandating of schools and teachers. This visualisation of curriculum planning as an 'endgame' is inherently at odds with an understanding of curriculum development as a process of teacher empowerment and renewal, a process that has no endpoint.

The opening out of the policy-making process, however, was a genuinely innovative and ground-breaking initiative of the CEB. Hitherto, education policy had been the preserve of government officials – civil servants and inspectors in the Department of Education – who would deal with the various interests in education in a bilateral manner.

The first chapter, 'The School and Education', notes that Irish society is undergoing 'significant changes, socially and economically' and the Board proposed to adopt a framework that would build on the strengths of the past while addressing the changing needs of society. Again stress is laid on the facility for schools to 'implement

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[3] A term originating in US management culture and coined by the CEB Chairman to describe committees that were convened with a specific remit and would disband on the completion of that specific task.

programmes geared to the particular needs of their students' (p. 8) and the intention to continue ongoing dialogue with interested parties and to utilise evaluation of educational practice.

The chapter is essentially a statement of aims of education; it contains only one sub-heading, significantly entitled 'education for creativity'. In a statement approaching an educational *credo*, the CEB stated

> Overcoming the fear of failure is one of the most significant contributions schools can make in preparing young people for adult life. They must be encouraged to think in terms of identifying problems and considering solutions rather than always seeking absolute right or wrong answers to problems. An imaginative failure can be more educationally worthwhile than a correct but poorly understood response (p. 9).

The chapter goes on to propose a general aim of education and to specify some constituent aims in fostering basic skills, adaptability and flexibility, mental and physical development, moral and spiritual development, values and beliefs of others, science and technology, mathematical competencies, creative and aesthetic experiences, and cultural appreciation. Five specific recommendations to the Minister close the chapter. These recommendations are all concerned with the operational practice of the anticipated statutory Board, with the exception of one broader recommendation: 'the promotion of creativity should permeate the work of the school' (p. 12).

In the second chapter some core principles and concerns that shape the CEB position on curriculum are outlined. The curriculum is defined as 'all those activities which take place within the organisational framework of the school to promote the development of its pupils' (p. 13). Where the earlier document check-listed twenty six issues of concern, this chapter names seven features that would underpin the Board's work on curriculum: adaptability (whether of the curriculum itself, of schools or of learners is not clear); continuity through the period of compulsory schooling; breadth and balance, with specialisation deferred until after the end of junior cycle; differentiation, according to levels of abstraction or complexity; relevance to present and prospective needs of pupils; flexibility in the national curriculum to allow schools devise and submit courses for

validation and to provide the curriculum in different modes including units of study; and resources, including the need for adequate staffing and facilities at school level and in-service training. Ten recommendations for the Minister, essentially recapping the issues raised in the chapter, are presented. These recommendations, while formally directed at the Minister are once more focussed on the tasks of the incoming statutory board.

The third chapter, dealing with the primary curriculum, comprises less than two pages, including two recommendations: that the Board should initiate an overall review of the curriculum at primary level and that there should be alignment between the curriculum at primary and post-primary levels.

Like *Issues and Structures*, the chapter dealing with the curriculum at the junior cycle of post-primary school is the most detailed chapter in *In Our Schools*. More than six pages were devoted to this topic. While the thinking encapsulated in the 'wheel' in the earlier document introduced a radical re-conceptualising of the junior cycle, the consultative process that followed had reshaped the Board's thinking. A revised model of curriculum is introduced in this report, one that acknowledges the established culture of subject-centred schools. In the new approach, curriculum is defined through two 'essential and complementary perspectives': areas of experience and elements of learning. While conceptually this approach could be seen as an operational interpretation of the earlier 'wheel' of educational experiences, the new model appears to ground curriculum thinking in the established environment of school subjects and curriculum timetables. This effect is magnified by the presentation in an appendix of a matrix of relationships between areas of experience and subjects. A table in the chapter also suggests minimum and maximum time allocations for the various areas of experience.

While senior cycle curriculum policy had received only cursory treatment in the first document, chapter five of *In Our Schools* deals more extensively with this domain. However, the treatment remains general, indicating broad policy orientations rather than specific programme structures (A further separate document entitled *Senior Cycle: Development and Directions* would be published in November 1986: this can be read as

an extension of the senior cycle chapter in *In Our Schools* and is referred to in more specific detail in Chapter Seven in this thesis). The nuanced and veiled references to then current sensitivities surrounding the relationship between education and training are of particular significance in this chapter. Reference is made to the publication the previous year of *Ages for Learning; Decisions of Government* (May 1985) in which the option of up to six years post-primary education, instead of the existing five years, was provided. Three of these years could be provided at senior cycle. *Ages for Learning* had provided for the continued provision of Vocational Preparation and Training (VPT) courses, but a strict delineation had been drawn between these courses and the general or academic education provided in the Leaving Certificate programme or in the expanded Transition Year option.

The core rationale for this division was an unspoken pragmatic one: VPT courses, provided predominantly in the vocational school sector, were in receipt of European funding for training. At the time, there was a strict barrier against any European Commission intervention into the national education programmes of member states. No such barrier existed in respect of training programmes. By a process of careful positioning and judicious language, however, that funding stream had become available to Irish schools providing VPT. The Department of Education wished the CEB to avoid any reference to VPT courses for fear of disrupting the arrangements already achieved for VPT. The CEB, while recognising the pragmatics of the situation, felt it would be unsustainable to consider senior cycle policy without addressing the role of vocational education, within which VPT courses had begun to assume significant proportions. Despite objections from and conflicts with the Department of Education, the CEB sets down its marker in an understated manner, highlighting

> … the need for a re-examination of the traditional definitions of and distinctions between general, technical and vocational education, between education and training and between initial and recurrent education … the introduction of any new overall policy should allow existing schemes and funding arrangements to continue and to evolve (p. 28).

At heart, the senior cycle landscape described in this chapter retains the Leaving Certificate as the major component, complemented by VPT courses 'and other pilot

programmes' (a veiled reference to the Senior Certificate programme being developed in Shannon Curriculum Development Centre and to other similar courses in the Curriculum Development Unit in Dublin), Transition Year options (an innovative programme designed as an intervention before the examination oriented Leaving certificate, but highly restricted in terms of availability) and 'continuation Programmes at Year 6' (a vaguely defined entity derived from a similarly titled programme in Scotland[4]).

Along with chapter four on junior cycle, chapter six 'Assessment and Certification' is the most substantial in the report. Much of the ground for this chapter had already been covered in the second publication of the CEB, *Assessment and Certification: a Consultative Document* (1985a). Two and a half pages of tightly written prose are followed by nearly six pages of detailed recommendations; the twenty-four specific recommendations outnumber by far the recommendations in any other chapter. The Board adopts the position that 'the role of assessment in promoting student learning should take precedence over its role for the purpose of certification' (p. 35). Some general recommendations are made in respect of assessment at primary level and in particular, the transfer mechanism for such assessment details as pupils move to post-primary level.

This chapter makes some significant policy recommendations of an operational nature in respect of national examination and certification arrangements, including the following:

- Where appropriate, part of the assessment for public examination should be school-based (6.9, p. 38);
- By the end of the compulsory school period, all students should have available to them certification indicating their educational experiences and achievements and the results of any tests the Board may devise or approve (6.14, p. 39).

A detailed description of a tiered and overlapping system of levels of assessment is also provided. Other operational issues such as external moderation of school-based

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[4] The influence on the CEB of Scotland and the Scottish Consultative Committee on the Curriculum (SCCC) was very significant: a number of visits were exchanged between CEB and SCCC personnel and the Scottish curriculum structure was seen as a viable point of reference for CEB consideration.

assessment and specifications for course design are also included in the recommendations.

The seventh and final chapter in the document is entitled "Strategy for Development". This is a purely operational section. It sets out a broad schedule of events and targets for the operations of the anticipated statutory board, including the vesting of responsibility for the state examination, assessment and certification system in such a Board from July 1988 (just over two years from the date of publication).

A series of seven appendices is included at the end. These include the terms of reference of the Interim Board, members of the Board, a list of the various consultative groups, some relevant statistics on education, a matrix of relationships between subjects and areas of experience, a classification of skills for assessment purposes and the membership of the various sub-committees established by the Board.

Discourse features

There are a number of recurring discourses as well as some discontinuities and developments within and between the two key CEB documents under review here. Three key discourse features can be discerned in the two documents under review in this chapter. These will be addressed in this section under the following headings: change, flexibility, and consultation.

The discourse of 'change'

Perhaps the most dominant and visible discourse in *Issues and Structures* is that of *change*. This is hardly surprising given the brief of the CEB and the fact that its establishment was in itself the result of a campaign for change in curriculum politics. However, the interpretation, orientation and rationalisation of that change will be of interest for the purposes of this research. Repeatedly, throughout the document reference is made, explicitly or implicitly, to the reality of *change* in the social environment and the corresponding need for the curriculum to address this change phenomenon. Thus:

… the new challenges, opportunities and problems of the rapidly changing society on this island (chapter 1, Introduction, p. 5).

… the context in which the aspirations must be examined today is very different from the relatively static context of a few years ago … in a world of change any statement of educational aims cannot be other than tentative (Chapter 3, p.13).

In looking at the present position in the senior cycle with a view to suggesting where changes might take place and what the nature of that change might be, a number of fundamental considerations should be taken into account. (Chapter 5, p. 21).

The need for change … the experience and insights gained from all these of these initiatives highlight the possibilities and the problems which are inherent in such change (Chapter 6, p.26).

This discourse of 'change' is similar to that noted by Taylor (2004, p. 439) in her treatment of policy in Queensland, insofar as it is also linked to a discourse of uncertainty driven by challenges and problems. However, the call for change in the CEB document is balanced by and frequently linked to the need for continuity and growth from existing practices. For instance:

… general consensus on the aims of education has long existed in Ireland (p. 12).

The worth, status and general acceptability of the Leaving Certificate as a basis for development should be recognised (p. 21).

In terms of substance, the two big points of change emerge in the promotion of a new framework (whether as 'the wheel' or as areas of experience) for the junior cycle, and in the unambiguous commitment to the necessity for school-based assessment as an element of the public examination system. Continuity and change are frequently linked, in order to establish a baseline from which to develop reforms, but the necessity of change is equally frequently adverted to. In 'The Need for Change' (a subsection of chapter six, Assessment and Certification in *Issues and Structures*), the case for change in assessment is expressed in terms that summarise the overall CEB position on change and continuity:

It could be argued that until recently the advantages of the public examination system outweighed its disadvantages. However, as a result of developments in education over the past two decades, in this country and elsewhere, the disadvantages seem too great to allow a continuation of the system precisely as it operates at the moment.

The discourse of 'flexibility'

Related to the discourse of change is that of flexibility. This concept and the term are used repeatedly throughout the documents, both in relation to the specification of national curriculum and to schools' capacity to operate relatively autonomously. An important thread running through both documents is the concept of 'validation' of locally generated curriculum initiatives, an issue that has disappeared almost entirely from educational discourse in the quarter-century since then.

The discourse of flexibility has become a common feature of educational policy 'as part of a global and globalising policy discourse' (Edwards et al 1999, p. 619) but its manifestation in the CEB document is less concerned with contemporary global influences than with inherited domestic practices.

The concept of 'flexibility' is referred to frequently in *Issues and Structures*, mostly in terms of structures rather of teaching and learning:

> The Board hopes to introduce flexible structures … (p. 6).

> It [the assessment system] should be sufficiently flexible to allow for the development of alternative programmes … (p. 7).

> Flexibility of curricula (p. 9).

> … structures at second and third level should be flexible enough to cater for [lifelong learning] (p. 10).

> The Board recognises the need for flexibility in school curricula … (p.11).

> … a curriculum structure that is sufficiently flexible to recognise and accommodate … (p. 16).

> … a modular structure would allow considerable flexibility (p. 23).

In the final report of the CEB, *In Our Schools*, a subsection of the chapter on 'The Curriculum' is devoted to flexibility; its opening statement runs as follows:

> The Board does not wish to impose a uniformity of approach on schools throughout the country. While centrally defined courses will continue to be

provided, the Board should also recommend for the approval of the Minister certain programmes or courses submitted for validation by schools, networks of schools or other agencies and authorities (p. 15).

Later in the same report, in specific recommendations for operational implementation, the CEB proposes that by July 1986 (two years hence) a system should be in place to carry out 'the validation of courses and programmes submitted by schools and developmental agencies seeking certification from the Board' (p. 44).

This concern for flexibility, and specifically for validation of local initiatives, was directly influenced by the pressures exerted by the constituencies of interest surrounding the Curriculum Development Unit in Dublin, the Curriculum Development Centre in Shannon and the Irish Association for Curriculum Development. The facility for local curriculum initiatives to operate under the ambit of the national examination system was seen as central element of curriculum development by those agencies. It reflected the central professional role of the teacher as curriculum developer as promulgated by Lawrence Stenhouse (e.g. 1975) whose influence on the CDU, CDC and IACD was profound. By contrast, the centralised power of the Department of Education in respect of both curriculum and examinations was seen as inimical to the professional autonomy of the teacher.

The discourse of 'consultation'
A prominent discourse evident in all the CEB documentation, and notably in the two under discussion here, is that of consultation. This manifests itself both in style and in content.

In terms of prose style, the first document is presented in very simple language, relatively free of jargon. For the most part the document is presented in short and simple sentences with great reliance on short paragraphs, addressing separate topics in a pithy prose style. A further strong style feature is the use of bullet points in almost all chapters; indeed the final chapter on operational issues consists almost entirely of ten bullet points. As has been noted, (Fairclough 2001, Taylor 2004), bullet points are generally used for apparent

'user-friendliness' but in fact they frequently disguise a 'reader-directive' strategy, leading and focusing the reader's thinking on a single route and discouraging alternative readings.

While the domain of assessment is a technically precise one and the treatment of assessment in *Issues and Structures* is noticeably different in style to that of more general curriculum matters, the assessment chapter is more discursive in style and consists of longer paragraphs than any of the other chapters. The language is still simple and the style is very accessible but the nature of the presentation is more thoughtful and more demanding of the reader. Two important appendices are included in the document, both dealing with assessment issues, one being an extended and authoritative glossary of concepts and terms, the other being a considered treatment of the public examinations system. The assessment chapter and appendices are clearly the work of another hand than that of the rest of the text. *In Our Schools*, while presented in a more discursive narrative style, with fewer headings and less reliance on bullet points, remains very simple in prose style.

A second prominent stylistic feature in *Issues and Structures* is the use of one diagram which fills page seventeen: 'the wheel', describing the core and options curriculum model for junior cycle (see appendix 1). This is a simple diagram, printed in shades of grey with text-labels printed across each of the various segments. This single diagram is located in the only chapter in the document that contains substantive policy proposals as distinct from speculative considerations. The graphic illustration of the central curriculum concept enunciated in that chapter carries enormous power, partly due to the paucity of substance in the rest of the document but also because of the simplicity of the design and the ease of understanding that it carries. The diagram explains the thinking more accurately and succinctly than does the accompanying text.

The 'wheel' encapsulated the thinking of the Board at that early stage of its existence and for supporters and critics of the CEB, it was to be a point of reference and a source of discussion in the months and years to come. *In Our Schools* revised and modified the

thinking captured in the wheel, but the Areas of Experience model it proposed, presented in tabular form, did not grab the readers' imagination in the same way.

For their time, these professionally produced and printed publications represented a significant departure for official education publications. The documents are both presented as simple, well-designed booklets with high production values. The language of the texts was relatively free of jargon; even the assessment chapters, which dealt with quite sophisticated technical concepts (e.g. formative and diagnostic assessment), were written in clear and accessible language. Simple explanations and expanded treatment of such issues as breadth and balance in the curriculum, and the complexities of school timetabling were provided. This stylistic format marked a major break from the traditional register of official education documents, which hitherto consisted mainly of either functional Circular Letters from the Department of Education or of dry and technical specialist committee reports (e.g. *Report of the Pupil Transfer Committee* Department of Education, 1981).

Most significantly, both texts were presented almost as if the Board were 'thinking aloud'. Thus, the first document is replete with phrases like 'the board recognises… agrees … is conscious of … endorses … believes (pp 8, 9). *In Our Schools,* which as a final report might be expected to be more declarative in style, retains this sense of organic development. That document makes deliberate reference to the growth and development of the board's policy position, tempered by the process of consultation that was its main defining feature. Thus, in the core chapter addressing substantive junior cycle policy, the report notes that

> (i)n the light of the subsequent consultative process, the Board has further developed its thinking on this matter. The board now presents the overall curricular framework from two essential and complementary perspectives … (1986, p. 20).

This presentational style can be understood to reflect two aspects of the CEB strategic position. Firstly, the consensual basis which the Board sought to establish as a policy platform, and simultaneously saw as the rationale for its own composition, was being

reinforced by this underpinning discourse of consultation. The cumulative effect of such a repeated *leitmotif* through the CEB texts serves to place the CEB itself as the voice of consensus and claim a democratic mandate for its position. Secondly, such consensual positioning can be interpreted as a protective and defensive mechanism in engaging with the Department of Education. The Interim CEB was very conscious of its interim status and the fact that there remained within the education system – and in particular within the Department of Education – some scepticism as to how seriously it should be taken. The Department remained the decision-maker and the establishment of a statutory Board remained a politically vulnerable conceit, with a general election expected and the possibility of another government taking office with no commitment to such an undertaking. In that context, the Interim CEB sought to present its views not just as those of a defined 'think-tank' but rather as the consensual voice not only of the extended education community but of the wider populace.

Conclusion

The extended family of documents published by the CEB broke new ground in Irish curriculum discourse. A number of threads can be discerned running through these documents, particularly as typified in both the first and the final reports published. These recurring themes can be categorised as falling within the discourses of change, of flexibility and of consultation. These discourses merge seamlessly into each other. For instance, the discourse of consultation is consciously tied to the discourse of change:

> A good deal of thought needs to be given to how a climate favourable to change can best be created and what structures are necessary to do this. Creating such a climate would involve initiating and sustaining an informed discussion on educational issues … (*Issues and Structures* p. 8).

The lacing of the discourse of flexibility through the documentation of the CEB is perhaps the most vivid example of the influence of the hitherto marginal curriculum initiatives generated by the CDU in Dublin and the CDC in Shannon and promulgated by the IACD. The story of how those influences waxed and waned in national curriculum policy and how the discourses of change, flexibility and consultation developed through the subsequent decades will be tracked and described in the following chapters.

A further political context also hovers around this first moment of study. The advent of the CEB was a political act, not only in the party-political sense, but also in terms of the social climate of the 1980s. That decade can be seen as a watershed in the evolution of modern Ireland. Bitter and divisive referendums on divorce and abortion were held, in the course of which a proposal for the introduction of divorce was defeated, and, separately, a prohibition of abortion, which was already illegal, was formally inserted in the constitution of the republic. Education was also a battleground in this climate of moral tensions, with proposals for the introduction of 'health education' being seen as a cloak for 'the ideological project of applying psychotherapy and secular humanism to moral education (McCarroll, 1987, p. 157). The CEB was seen as a stalking horse for this form of 'indoctrination'. During the general election campaign of 1987, literature was circulated demanding that no support be given to the establishment of the CEB or any similar board[5].   This was not simply a marginal or extremist voice: prominent individual candidates from various parties had declared support for such stances and the referendum results indicated the strongly-felt values of a significant proportion of the population.

This socio-political context was to change dramatically in the subsequent decades.

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[5] An anonymous election 'flyer' headed 'Give your children and grandchildren a Good Start in Life' called for opposition to the establishment of the CEB and reproduced a copy of the curriculum 'wheel' from *Issues and Structures* to highlight the perceived dangers.

CHAPTER 4
Three Moments: Two – Established Positions

Introduction

This chapter examines three significant publications in the 1990s, a decade that can already be seen as one of great significance in Irish education policy in general, curriculum policy in particular.

The triumph of western corporatism, epitomised by the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989, had led to a more assertive engagement with the public sphere by the state in most western economies. Education was increasingly interpreted as an agency of economic development, and educational levels and standards were repeatedly expressed in terms of social utility rather than self-realisation (Skilbeck et al, 1994). In the UK, the dominant political rhetoric addressing education found expression as a 'back to basics' call, most memorably by the then Prime Minister John Major in 1993:

> We have allowed things to happen that we should never have tolerated. We have listened too often and too long to people whose ideas are light years away from common sense. In our schools we did away with traditional subjects, grammar, spelling, tables, and the old ways of teaching them… (*The Guardian*, 26 October 1993)

This emotive reaction against the perceived deficiencies of contemporary schooling was channelled into a more prescriptive curriculum model, dominated by extensive external testing. The introduction of a national curriculum in England and Wales, and in Northern Ireland, was accompanied by a series of national tests at four 'key stages', between ages eight and sixteen years (Lawton, 1996; McEwen, 2004). The national curriculum body was again restructured, this time as the National Curriculum Council, and its chief executive officer became widely known for his controversial conservative polemics about educational standards and practices (Woodhead, 2002). This mantra of complaint was echoed in the popular media and in political debate (Phillips, 1996).

In Ireland, education at all levels also came under review. While the stridency of the 'back to basics' movement did not gain traction in public debate, more general

dissatisfaction surfaced, especially with the nature of technical and vocational education. The publication of the government Green Paper *Education in a Changing World* (1992) came in the middle of a series of major publications directly or indirectly addressing curriculum matters in Ireland. These included the OECD report on Irish education (1991), the report of the Industrial Policy Review Group (the Culliton Report) *A Time for Change* (1992), which included a short but influential chapter on education, research reports published by the Curriculum Awareness Action Group (CAAG 1990) and by the Economic and Social Research Institute (Hannon and Shortall, 1991) and the report of the National Education Convention (Coolahan 1994). The debate engendered by the Green Paper provided the context within which the NCCA published its curriculum programme *Curriculum and Assessment Policy: Towards the New Century* (1993) and the government ultimately published the White Paper *Charting Our Education Future* (1995). For the present study, these three publications – Green Paper 1992, NCCA 1993 and White Paper 1995 – can be isolated from the others and seen as significant links in the specific genre chain of official curriculum discourse. Together they constitute the 'second moment' of this study of curriculum discourse.

The process of producing a green or white paper is a long one, typically involving a team of civil servants in consultation with various professional interests. In the case of the Green Paper, work had commenced on such a paper following the publication of the OECD report in 1991. Under the direction of the then Minister for Education, Mary O'Rourke, preliminary work was developed by the internal departmental team in collaboration with Professor John Coolahan who was brought into the process by ministerial invitation. An early draft was in place when a change of Minister occurred in 1991; the new Minister, Noel Davern, maintained the impetus, with a further draft incorporating a more developed vocational education dimension but still within the ethos of the paper already drafted.

A change of leadership within the Fianna Fáil party in 1992, however, led to significant changes in cabinet personnel and in education policy emphasis. The new party leader, Albert Reynolds, was elected Taoiseach and came into office with a reputation for a

strong business orientation. He also brought a radical change of personnel into his cabinet. Noel Davern was replaced as Minister for Education by Seamus Brennan who was given a very specific brief to inculcate values of enterprise in the education system, as recommended by the Culliton Report (Gleeson, 2000, p.144).

Education for a Changing World

One of the first steps taken by the new minister was to address the Green Paper then in gestation. Some radical reworking of the thrust of that paper was undertaken. In an unusual step, a preliminary 'introduction' to the paper was published in advance of the full publication, in order to orient thinking and expectations with particular reference to the annual conferences of the Teacher Unions which were occurring at that time (Gleeson, 2000, p. 144; Walshe, 1999, p. 25). The introduction was published on 21 April 1992, with the full paper following in June 1992.

The curious gestation, pre-publication drafting and ultimate 'staggered' launch of the paper can be tracked in the text itself. Substantial drafts of the paper had been prepared under the watch of the previous Ministers O'Rourke and Davern but the new Taoiseach and Minister were anxious to impose a distinctive tone and emphasis that they felt was not embodied sufficiently in those drafts[6]. Thus, the 'Introduction' to the Green Paper was published in advance of the text itself in order to highlight the intended priorities of the new administration. The extended Introduction was subsequently included as the first 30 pages of the Green Paper, which comprised 237 pages. It is clear that large tracts of the succeeding chapters remained unaltered from the earlier drafts, as the style and rhetoric of the Introduction and of some elements within the text contrast quite strongly with the rest of the main body of text. It was this new dimension that generated most interest and debate, which presumably was the intention of the Minister and his advisors.

The dominant discourse of the Green Paper is signalled in its title – 'Education for a Changing World' – and the theme of 'change' was stitched into the rhetoric of the paper

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[6] The political evolution of the Green Paper is documented by John Walshe in his book *A New Partnership in Education* (IPA, 1999) and Jim Gleeson in his unpublished PhD thesis, Post-primary Curriculum Policy and Practice in Ireland: Fragmentation, Contestation and Partnership (University of East Anglia, 2000)

from its opening pages. This was almost a cliché even then: nearly ten years earlier, two academics and curriculum developers had published research carried out for the Irish Association of Curriculum Development in a book entitled *The Challenge of Change* (Crooks and McKernan, 1984); this same title was used as the opening sub-heading for the Introduction to the Green Paper. The discourse of change was well established in education debate. The CEB documents had constantly advocated change and, as noted in Chapter Three above, the creation of a climate favourable to 'change' was the most significant issue identified by the CEB in its first publication *Issues and Structures in Education* in 1984.

The Green Paper, however, goes further through its interpretation of the meaning of change as being synonymous with 'enterprise'. It consciously links the discourse of 'change' with that of 'enterprise'. The Minister indicates in his Foreword that 'certain of the proposals involve radical reform, in order to introduce *a spirit of enterprise* [emphasis added] in our young people and to prepare them for a new world'.

The introduction presents the Green Paper in a rolling mantra of 'change' – 'the challenge of change', 'obstacles in the way of change' and crucially, 'responding to change'. In this latter aspect, the Green Paper proposes six key aims in response to the challenges and shortcomings identified; these aims are stated as follows (1992, p. 5):

1. To establish greater equity in education – particularly for those who are disadvantaged socially, economically, physically or mentally.
2. To broaden Irish education – so as to equip students more effectively for life, for work in an enterprise culture, and for citizenship of Europe.
3. To make the best use of education resources – by radically devolving administration, introducing the best management practices and strengthening policy-making.
4. To train and develop teachers so as to equip them for a constantly changing environment.
5. To create a system of effective quality assurance.
6. To ensure greater openness and accountability throughout the system, and maximise parent involvement and choice.

The tone of the paper is set in the opening page, addressing 'the challenge of change', when the first challenge identified was the need,

… particularly in an enterprise culture, to equip students with the ability to think and to solve problems - rather than just with an accumulation of knowledge (p. 3).

The educational thrust of that statement was unremarkable even then – the differentiation between knowledge accumulation and creative thinking and problem solving was, for instance, a prominent theme of the CEB. However, the context of an 'enterprise culture' and the language and concepts associated with that culture, introduced a tone and perspective that did not sit easily with conventional education debate. The Green Paper of course addresses the entire spectrum of education policy across all sectors, including all aspects of policy and implementation. The elements with most specific reference to curriculum are contained in chapter four, 'Broadening Education', dealing with the second of the key aims described above. This chapter provoked a significant controversy within the education community.

The paper interprets the term 'curriculum' as

> … the content, structure and processes of teaching and learning which the school provides in accordance with its educational objectives and values. It includes specific and implicit elements. The specific elements are those concepts, skills, areas of knowledge and attitudes which children learn at school as part of their personal and social development. The implicit elements are those factors that make up the ethos and general environment of the school (p. 86).

As a definition of curriculum, this stands within the mainstream of conventional education understanding. The strategic orientation of the curriculum as played out in the paper, however, provides a more ideological interpretation, orienting the curriculum to the changing external context into which school-leavers in particular will be entering. In this respect, three themes are highlighted – education for work, education for life and education for European citizenship. The teaching of modern European languages is given prominence (with proposals for developing competence at primary level, and a weighting of 60% assessment for oral and aural competence at post-primary level) as is the development of the health-promoting school, including improved provision for physical education and for health education.

The novel dimension that the Green Paper brought to the curriculum debate is contained within the section of the chapter dealing with post-primary curriculum. In a short subsection entitled 'Enterprise and Technology', the fingerprints of the new Minister and Taoiseach are vividly displayed. While acknowledging that 'education for enterprise (is) essentially a cross-curricular theme' (p. 95), an explicit commitment is given to introduce a new subject called 'Enterprise and Technology Studies' to be obligatory for all students initially at junior cycle and ultimately at Leaving Certificate level also.

The response of education interests, including teacher unions and school management bodies as well as academic commentators, was 'consistently negative' (Gleeson, 2000, p. 146). The main item of disquiet invariably was the rhetoric of the 'enterprise culture' and in particular the proposed new subject 'Enterprise and Technology Studies'. Elsewhere in the Green Paper, the presentation of the school principal as the 'chief executive' of the school (p. 148) also generated a groundswell of resistance. This perceived bias towards a utilitarian model of education and a business model of schooling also generated another stream of critical response around the failure to address and articulate the underlying philosophy of education.

Looked at from the perspective of 2009, the furore generated by the Green Paper is somewhat puzzling. The 'enterprise culture' discourse that pervaded the document was neither unique nor original to that document. It was a dominant motif in many of the earlier documents published around that time, including notably the Culliton Report (1992). More particularly, it was a recurring element in the discourse of the CEB and NCCA, especially evident in the thinking and leadership of its first Chairperson, Dr. Edward Walsh. Two factors contributed to the virulence of the response uniquely generated by the Green Paper. Firstly, the curriculum publications of the CEB/NCCA ensured that such entrepreneurial thinking was mediated and presented through curriculum structures and processes that were identifiably located within educational practice. Secondly, and more significantly, a government Green Paper operates at a different level to other reports, in that it is a draft statement of formal government policy, not an advisory note to government. As such, it is one small step away from national

policy and so the political stakes in such a document are much higher than in commissioned advisory reports or external academic or research reports.

In his Foreword to the Green Paper, the Minister for Education Seamus Brennan envisages 'a period of about six months for consultation and debate' before the Government would 'prepare a White Paper followed by a series of Education Bills to provide the legislative framework for a reformed structure' (p. xx). In the event, the consultation period took a lot longer than six months. A series of regional meetings was organised by the Department of Education to provide a public forum for discussion of various themes raised in the Green Paper. Four such meetings were held in Cork, Limerick, Sligo and Athlone, at which the Minister (or, in his absence, the Secretary of the Department of Education) spoke briefly and a panel of invited speakers responded to the themes of equity, partnership, quality, devolution and education for life and work (Department of Education, Oct 1992).

A major contextual change occurred between the publication of the Green Paper and the end of the consultation period: a general election took place in November 1992 and a new government was installed on 12 January 1993 through a novel coalition between Fianna Fáil and Labour. Niamh Bhreathnach became Minister for Education, the first Labour Party holder of that office. The entrepreneurial rhetoric of the previous administration was toned down somewhat under the new Minister, while an even more extensive and intensive process of review and reflection of education was launched.

Curriculum and Assessment Policy - Towards the New Century

An important response to the curriculum content of the Green Paper was that of the NCCA. *Curriculum and Assessment Policy - Towards the New Century* was published by the NCCA in March 1983, very early in the ministry of the new incumbent[7]. It is quite specifically self-described as

> NCCA Policy Statements and Recommendations to the Minister for Education on issues arising from the publication of the Government's Green Paper *Education for a Changing World*, and the debate which has followed (NCCA, 1993, title page).

The NCCA document makes pointed, if oblique, reference to the 'technology/ enterprise' debate that emerged from the Green Paper debate. The Foreword by Dr. Tom Murphy, the new NCCA Chairperson, reiterates again the commitment to change, but this commitment is couched in tacit opposition to the perceived opportunism of the Green Paper's 'enterprise' ethic. The NCCA's proposals are

> presented in a spirit of commitment to change, a commitment not induced by passing fads or trends … It is appropriate to highlight one area of concern to us at this point: what sometimes in public debate appears to be a juxtaposition between education in the arts and education in science and technology. The NCCA position is that a broad and balanced education must provide the young person with a substantial experience **both** in the arts **and** in science and technology. It is dangerous folly to set up one aspect of the curriculum against another [emphasis in original].

The document itself constitutes the fullest expression of the overall curriculum policy position of the NCCA. It is presented as a sequence of three policy statements in respect of the curriculum at primary level, at the junior cycle of second level and at the senior cycle of second level education. The essential features of the NCCA curriculum proposals can be traced through their evolution from the earlier CEB documents. Thus the primary curriculum statement is derived from an early CEB publication on primary education (CEB 1985b) and more specifically from the report of the Primary Curriculum Review Body (PCRB), which was published by the NCCA in 1990.

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[7] The launch of the NCCA document in the Shelbourne Hotel, Dublin in March 1993 was one of the first public appearances of the Minister and coincidentally of the newly appointed Secretary General of the Department of Education, Dr. Don Thornhill.

At post-primary level, the NCCA proposes a curriculum framework within which the Junior Certificate programme would be presented. In fact, this was a retrospective exercise, as the Junior Certificate programme had already been introduced in 1989 with the first award of the certificate in 1992. However, the junior cycle framework proposed by the CEB (*In Our Schools* 1986) had never been formally adopted by the state: the NCCA in its 1993 document was proposing do this in a pragmatic manner that introduced some new elements and concepts grafted on to existing norms and practice. Thus, the essential conceptual presentation of the junior cycle is envisioned as 'a set of pupil entitlements which can be delivered through a Curriculum Framework which incorporates certain Course Requirements[8]' (NCCA, 1993, p. 26).

This can be seen as an archetypal positioning of the NCCA between revolution and evolution, introducing new thinking, mainstreaming dormant proposals and repackaging established practices. Thus,

- 'Pupil entitlement' was a new concept in official curriculum policy in Ireland at the time. It was designed to place the learner at the centre of the curriculum process, and was a precursor of what evolved over time to become the 'learning outcomes' curriculum strategy of the early twenty-first century. Seven broad entitlements were identified, embracing generic domains of experience or competence that all pupils would have on completion of the Junior Certificate programme. An escape clause was added that such entitlements 'should always be interpreted with due regard to pupil ability and aptitude and to school resources' (p. 28). The 'pupil entitlement' concept echoed the then current rhetoric in the UK which increasingly presented education in terms of service to consumer, customer or client (NCC/FEU, 1993). The ideological implications of this rhetoric were not fully appreciated or understood within the NCCA at the time.

- The Curriculum Framework was essentially the same as that proposed by the CEB in 1986 but which had not yet achieved any formal legitimacy. This framework

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[8] The term 'course requirements' might be better understood as 'required courses' or mandatory subjects for recognised pupils taking the Junior Certificate examination.

was based on the principles of 'breadth and balance' that echoed explicitly the mantra of the earlier CEB documents of 1984 and 1986.

- Course requirements were prescribed ostensibly for two reasons: the desire to establish a common core experience for all young people, and the recognition of the administrative tradition and culture of schools as reflected in timetables, staff qualifications and school facilities. The course requirements were defined in terms of specific mandatory subjects, with an immediate (1994) application and a modified model for the medium term (1996). The designated courses were essentially a compendium of those required courses hitherto specified for the old Intermediate Certificate (secondary schools) and Day Vocational (Group) Certificate (vocational and community/comprehensive schools) that were replaced by the Junior Certificate programme.

Along with the concept of 'pupil entitlements', the other significant new idea to be introduced in this chapter is that of short-courses, in areas such as civic education, technology and arts education. Furthermore, two significant proposals are included among the appendices to the treatment of junior cycle. The first is the advocacy of the Junior Certificate School Programme, an intervention into the conventional Junior Certificate programme, aimed especially at potential early school leavers. This was derived from a longstanding project operated by the CDVEC Curriculum Development Unit, which had its origins in an EU sponsored project as far back as 1979. This constitutes the only element in the NCCA proposals that maintained the concept of devolved authority to schools, including the validation of school-developed curricula.

A second appendix is a formal statement on technological education, presented as guidance on policy as requested by the then Minister for Education after the publication of the Green Paper. This statement comprises a commitment to a common syllabus framework for technology subjects. Within this approach the NCCA formally proposes that the 'technology and enterprise' title suggested in the Green Paper not be adopted because 'incorporating the term 'enterprise' in the title of a subject may … imply that other subjects have no role' in fostering enterprise (p. 43). This is a formal statement of

resistance to the position adopted in the Green Paper. At another time, it would be a high risk strategy for the NCCA so openly to oppose the stated position of the Minister for Education and indeed the government itself. However, as noted above, by the time the NCCA paper was published, there had been a change of government and the 'mood music' of the new administration indicated that positions set out in the Green Paper were not necessarily going to be defended.

The fraught area of assessment, which had been the source of dispute and of industrial action by the Association of Secondary Teachers, Ireland (ASTI), the largest post-primary teacher union, is also addressed specifically. A less doctrinaire tone is adopted as compared with earlier documents, with special reliance being placed on the unpublished report of a working group chaired by the Chairman of the NCCA ('The Murphy Report'), which charted a modest line towards *in situ* assessment of work in practical subjects, with a strong external assessment component complemented by initial inputs from an internal assessor.

The chapter dealing with junior cycle, while introducing some new ideas, was essentially a reformulation and rationalisation of a policy practice that had been already established. The subsequent chapter on senior cycle curriculum enters new territory. Again, the chapter is presented as a programme 'to facilitate the change and development signalled by the Green Paper and shaped by the debate and discussion which has followed' (p. 50). It had been presaged by a draft document entitled *The Curriculum at Senior Cycle* that had been circulated amongst key stakeholders and had informed some of the thinking that emerged in the Green Paper. The NCCA now developed its position further towards an integrated but expanded Leaving Certificate suite of programmes.

The opening paragraphs constitute a formal statement of the NCCA approach to curriculum change. This approach, it declares

> … for pragmatic and principled reasons, is characterised by gradual, incremental growth, with controlled points of crucial change, respecting the integrity of the current system as much as the desired long-term outcome (p. 49).

Critics of NCCA have repeatedly pointed out that its curriculum models, for all the rhetoric, introduced no substantial change at the heart of curriculum practice (e.g. Breathnach, 1995; Callan 1995, 1997; Gleeson 2000; Mackey 1998; Trant 1998). The construction of the 1993 policy statements is vulnerable to this critique also. The range of new ideas, concepts and constructions are presented in a curriculum framework that allows for much of current practice to be maintained or at most, to be tweaked so as to meet the perceived requirements of the new regime. A conjoined concept of 'pragmatism and principle' flows through all NCCA documents, with what effect on schools and on the system remained to be seen.

The senior cycle chapter presents a map of senior cycle programmes that are expressed in the light of four policy premises:

1. The Senior Cycle curriculum should be viewed as a single entity and designed to cater for up to 90% of the age range 15 to 18 years;
2. Priority must be give to the provision of quality experience, in a variety of forms, to all, including both high achieving students and those for whom the Leaving Certificate programme is unsuited;
3. One major programme should be provided at senior cycle for national certification - the Leaving Certificate programme; the Transition Programme should also be recognised for funding and planning purposes as an integral part of the three-year senior cycle but not for national certification;
4. Appropriate forms of student assessment must be developed to complement the curricular approaches set out in senior cycle programme (pp. 51-53).

Within the three-year senior cycle entitlement, the NCCA proposes to offer the Transition Year programme in a flexible format, with the option for schools to provide the programme in one discrete year or in a dispersed fashion over three years (what became known as the 'wedge' model because of the graphic used to illustrate it, the shaded area indicating the TY component as a diminishing presence over three years, appearing like a wedge). In the context of a retention target of 90% , the NCCA proposes an expanded Leaving Certificate programme that would incorporate the traditional LC, the recently developed but restricted Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and a new suite of courses to be called Leaving Certificate Senior Courses.

This latter concept was a radical innovation, tentatively signalled in the earlier NCCA (1992) discussion paper and appearing in the Green Paper as a further discussion point. By formally including within the 'gold standard' of the Leaving Certificate programme a set of courses from a different curriculum background, a significant moment was being announced. The dissemination of innovation in terms of take-up of pilot projects on a national basis was a rare event in curriculum development. These LC Senior Courses were conceived as direct descendents of the curriculum projects generated by the CDVEC Curriculum Development Unit and by the Shannon Curriculum Development Centre. They drew specifically upon the pilot schemes associated with the Pre-employment, Career Foundation and Vocational Preparation courses operated by the CDU and especially the Senior Certificate courses developed by Shannon.

The NCCA proposes that students would be free to take a 'mix-and-match' approach to the LC courses, as between Higher Level, Ordinary Level and Senior courses: 'In general, however, a selection of Senior Courses should be taken as an entire programme, with an ethos and integrity of its own' (NCCA, 1993, p. 56). It was envisaged that Senior Courses[9] would have no direct relationship in form or content to the other Higher and Ordinary courses. Senior courses were envisaged as providing teaching and learning methodologies distinct from traditional LC practice.

In terms of strategy and of educational politics, the NCCA proposals could be seen to constitute the response of the education sector to the critical commentaries emanating from the Culliton Report (which specifically called for a parallel high-status vocational certificate alongside the Leaving Certificate), the OECD report (1991) and the Green Paper which were also critical of the classical liberal-humanities dominance of the Irish Leaving Certificate. It also marked a significant point in the generations-old rivalry between education and training bodies, in terms of provision of vocational education and training. Under the NCCA proposals, all vocational education and training for people under the age of eighteen years would be the formal preserve of the education system.

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[9] In a brief appendix to the chapter, the NCCA discussed various possible titles for the new courses, eventually choosing the designation 'senior' because of its resonance with the pilot project and also its clear lack of comparability with the other courses.

The NCCA publication was the single most comprehensive statement of curriculum policy yet presented in the public sphere, covering as it did primary curriculum, junior cycle and senior cycle post-primary curriculum matters. Previous publications by the CEB/NCCA had been focussed on one or other of these sectors, but never all three in specific detail.

There is, however, one strange note sounded in this publication, which reverberates in a different register to the many previous publications of CEB/NCCA. All the verbs utilised in *Towards the New Century* are in the imperative not the conditional voice. The NCCA was an advisory body charged with advising the Minister on curriculum and assessment matters. The statutory role envisaged for the CEB had not been fulfilled so the body had no formal executive functions. Even if it had been a statutory body, formal approval of the Minister and her Department would have been required before many of the policy pronouncements included in the NCCA publication could have become official policy.

The NCCA publication was very well received by the education community generally and by the public insofar as it was aware of it. The response of the Minister for Education and of her Department however was quite muted. The Minister, her Departmental Secretary General and her immediate advisors were all new in their positions. Within the Department itself, there was a residue of ill-will towards the NCCA, still perceived as a rival and competing power base in matters traditionally the sole preserve of the Department. In that context the assertive display of the NCCA in seemingly claiming for itself the authority to make decisions about what *will*, rather than what should or might happen in the future, was bound to alienate many in the Department. Insiders perceived the high profile launch of the document, with the Minister and her Secretary in attendance but not in control, as a form of NCCA hubris[10]. The Minister said very little, promising only to read the document very carefully.

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[10] Attitudes of the Minister and her advisors in the Department of Education were gleaned through informal conversations with the present author at the time.

The subsequent relationship between the NCCA and the Department of Education continued to be an uneasy one. Paradoxically, however, the Minister and her Department adopted the essence of the NCCA policy proposals while making little or no public acknowledgement of this. The Minister agreed to establish a new strand within an expanded Leaving Certificate provision, indicating, however, that it should be called the Leaving Certificate Applied programme and that it should be a ring-fenced programme, with no facility for students to take some courses from the LC Higher and Ordinary schedules. The NCCA established a dedicated committee to develop the Leaving Certificate Applied, chaired by Senator Feargal Quinn.

Charting Our Education Future

Under the new Minister and Secretary General, the Department of Education itself went through a major process of regeneration, both in terms of internal restructuring and of external procedures. A major initiative undertaken by the Minister was the establishment of the National Education Convention (NEC) in November 1993. Chaired by Dr. Dervilla Donnelly and led by Professor John Coolahan and a handpicked secretariat nominated by the Minister, the NEC was a public process, whereby all the various parties interested in education were invited to engage in public with the NEC secretariat at their public hearings in Dublin Castle. In an unprecedented display of transparency, all the players in education, including the leaders of different religions, the teacher unions, the universities and the Department of Education itself, made public submissions and were interrogated about their positions on such issues as the ownership and control of schools, denominational education and other sensitive and controversial issues.

The role of curriculum in these discussions was relatively minor (see Gleeson, 2000) as most public attention focused on some of the public flashpoints of education policy, such as school ownership and control, rather than the internal, technical issues of teaching and learning. The NCCA was among those invited to present to the NEC: its 1993 policy document was the main point of reference for its submission. The NEC report, published in 1994, gave general support to the curriculum and assessment policies advocated by the

NCCA, noting some concerns about the issue of parity of esteem in relation to such initiatives as the LC Senior Courses (Coolahan, 1994).

The NEC can be seen as the highpoint in this long process of discussion and debate. The process had started with a number of publications and reports and, in curriculum terms, key milestones included the Green Paper *Education for a Changing World* and the NCCA's *Curriculum and Assessment Towards the New Century*. The context for this extended process of discussion was the ultimate preparation of a White Paper on Education, which would map out the state's policy in education for the foreseeable future. A previous White Paper had been published in 1980, but that had not had any significant impact on the world of education. The debate in the 1990s had been at a much higher level and the issues raised had been of much greater depth, so the White Paper was awaited with great interest.

The Government White Paper *Charting Our Education Future* was duly published in 1995. It is a long and comprehensive paper, covering the entire remit of the state's education domain. It is structured in seven parts, covering the Philosophical Framework, the Provision of Education, the Teaching Profession, Parental Involvement, Organisational Framework, International Dimension and the Legal and Constitutional Framework. In addressing the philosophical framework, the White Paper sets out five key concepts that would underpin the state's policy in education: pluralism, equality, partnership, quality and accountability (pp 7-9).

There are a number of examples of radical thinking involved in the paper, including a major shift in policy towards the introduction of Local Education Boards, intermediate structures that would have responsibility regionally for the provision of education services, a function hitherto vested in the Department of Education itself. The conscious orientation of the state's policy was now to present the Department of Education as a leaner organisation, charged more explicitly with a strategic brief, devolving authority to local agencies for the administration and the day-to-day running of the system.

Within Part 2 of the document, *The Provision of Education*, specific chapters are dedicated to each of the sectors of primary education, second-level education, further education and higher education, as well as chapters devoted to sport and youth work. In the chapters on primary education and post-primary education, curriculum matters are given great prominence. In both chapters, the thrust of the NCCA proposals as set out in *Towards the New Century*, are reiterated as government policy. Long tracts within the chapter on post-primary are taken verbatim (but without acknowledgement) from the NCCA publication. At junior cycle, the NCCA formulation of pupil entitlements within a curriculum framework encompassing course requirements is restated as government policy, with some minor adjustments. Thus, while the concept of 'pupil entitlements' is replaced by 'educational objectives'[11], the original NCCA text describing seven pupil entitlements is retained unaltered within the rubric of 'objectives' (pp 44-5).

One significant distinction between the NCCA proposals and the policy statements of the White Paper occurred in the listing of required subjects for the Junior Certificate. History and Geography had been included in the NCCA listing: they were staple elements of the traditional secondary school and while they had not been compulsory subjects in the vocational sector, they were *de facto* core subjects in all schools[12]. Controversially, the White Paper removed them from the list of required subjects for the Junior Certificate. This provoked an outcry among vested interests, especially among the constituency of historians and history graduates, which resulted in a high-profile, co-ordinated and systematic campaign in the media, in public fora and in political circles to 'save' History from extinction and to save the country for civilisation. No definitive reason was ever given for the de-listing of History and Geography. Initial responses from the Department were inclined to divert enquiries to the NCCA but the NCCA was very quick to make clear that this was not NCCA policy, as the public record showed.

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[11] Within the Department of Education, there were concerns that the concept of 'pupil entitlements' could leave the state vulnerable to litigation (personal communication).

[12] For examination purposes, History and Geography had been conjoined as one subject in the Intermediate Certificate examination; the Junior Certificate formally uncoupled these subjects.

Three observations might be made about the controversy. Firstly, it is likely that the omission of History and Geography was the result of a simple mistake, rather than a conscious educational decision[13]. The treatment of the required courses issue in the White Paper was addressed in a paragraph (p. 48) of continuous prose rather than as a list: by such editorial decisions can some mistakes be hidden. Secondly, the powerful constituency of interest that the 'history lobby' constitutes in Irish life was made visible by the campaign that took place (see Irish Times letters pages April-June 1995 for a series of letters from prominent figures). And thirdly, curriculum matters rarely generate such public interest as when they are framed in traditional subject and examination contexts.

Discourse Features

At first glance, the three key papers under review in this chapter present a curriculum discourse that shows continuity from that of the curriculum publications of the mid-1980s. However, there are significant changes both in the context and the substance of the discourse. The three discourses of change, flexibility and consultation identified as underpinning the earlier documents are treated quite differently in the documents under review here.

The discourse of change

The call for change had been a peripheral voice in the 1980s, first voiced by the curriculum projects at the margins of the system (CDU/CDC), and given a formal platform by the creation of the new CEB. By the 1990s, the call for change in curriculum terms had become unremarkable and commonplace, led by the central Department of Education itself. The details of change were unclear, as manifested by the Green Paper's confusion as to how exactly the new spirit of enterprise would translate into curriculum structures.

The period was marked by the publication of extensive reviews and critiques of education, mainly in respect of its role in Irish economic life. Most of these called for

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[13] Informal discussions with advisors to the Minister.

radical action to affect change. However, while the rhetoric of change remains dominant in the threads of debate, the adherence to continuity, albeit as a pragmatic rather than ideological position, remained dominant in policy. The default strategy of the NCCA had by now become a tendency to present new ideas alongside dormant proposals and repackaged established practices, as a basis for new policy. This proved to be an attractive combination for the system to adopt, as it seemed to emphasise continuity as much as change. The NCCA had adopted a more conservative, conciliatory tone in its treatment of change: the 'gradual, incremental growth, with controlled points of crucial change, respecting the integrity of the current system as much as the desired long-term outcome' that it advocated (1993, p. 49) was much less threatening than even the moderate positions adopted by the CEB.

The government was happy to adopt its proposals almost entirely in the White Paper, with scarcely a comment, and with no acknowledgement.

The discourse of flexibility

Flexibility, as we have seen in chapter three, was central to the initial thrust of the curriculum development movement. This was linked inextricably to the concepts of teacher professionalism and professional autonomy. The early CEB documents were replete with references to flexibility. In the new policy framework, that concept of local flexibility had become virtually extinct. The expanded national curriculum and examination system, it was implied, would now accommodate that flexibility: one single Junior Certificate programme and three orientations of the national Leaving Certificate programme should be sufficient to obviate the need for local schools to generate their own programmes and approaches.

Almost lost in the middle of the NCCA 1993 policy document, and briefly but crucially referred to in the White Paper, was the Junior Certificate Schools Programme, an intervention into the national programme whereby schools could provide some local differentiation to meet the needs of potential early school leavers. This was the only remaining model of local autonomy to survive within the new policy framework. As an

initiative, it had been maintained by the CDU within a network of participating schools for more than twelve years, with no official sanction, let alone financial or material support. It had now received an official recognition almost unnoticed and by default within the new broad curriculum framework.

The discourse of consultation

The consultative process that had been a hallmark of the CEB had now become part of the modus operandi of the Department of Education itself. The Green Paper was followed by an extensive process of consultation through public meetings, submissions and debates. The concept had been formalised within the representative composition of the NCCA itself and was the model for many other new educational entities (e.g. the National Council for Vocational Awards (NCVA) established in 1991). The development of a partnership approach to education, of which the CEB/NCCA was perhaps the first manifestation, reached its apogee in the National Education Convention (NEC). As an approach to public policy, partnership had become the engine for a programme of national economic recovery and was to be the distinctive contribution that Ireland would make to public policy internationally, through the coming decade of then unforeseen economic growth and prosperity.

The CEB had been seen as a bridge for the radical ideas of the curriculum development movement to move from the margins into the central positions of power. By the mid-1990s however, this bridge had been captured by the dominant power players of the education world – the teacher unions and management bodies – and the levers and gates to the bridge were now controlled by the Department of Education. The curriculum rhetoric of the NCCA, while retaining significant elements of the earlier radical language, had now become the conventional discourse of the education partners, who were able to neutralise its perceived excesses and adapt its language to prevailing conditions.

Conclusion

The key driver for change in the education debate was the economic crisis that the country was experiencing in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The influential Culliton

Report (1992) had included a short but significant chapter on education that proposed a new vocational/technical programme of equal status to the Leaving Certificate. This idea was not new – Dr. Patrick Hillery, Minister for Education in 1964, had proposed such a development (Randles 1975). The response of the education community was articulated by the NCCA in the expansion of the LC to incorporate a stronger vocational ethos – the dominance of the LC was such that any alternative label, no matter how good the contents, would take at least two generations to establish itself as a viable alternative. The appeal of the NCCA position was that it seemed to accommodate the current system and practices of schools while introducing apparently radical new dimensions. The existence of a community of practice around the CDU and CDC networks of schools, working outside the national system, provided a ready made and timely model for the necessary new initiatives.

The international experience of educational restructuring was a background to the Irish debates. The OECD review of Irish education (1991) introduced an important external perspective but the wave of international reform was not the dominant factor. Policy borrowing was low-level and often unconscious, as in the NCCA adoption of the concept of 'entitlements'. Other issues however, such as accountability, quality assurance and devolution were beginning to become part of the common lexicon of educational discourse.

The mid 1990s, the second of our 'moments', was a most significant period of Irish education, embracing an unprecedented range of policy discussion and debate. In curriculum terms, the role of the NCCA had evolved to one of national strategic importance. The curriculum vision of the NCCA was effectively endorsed in the definitive government White Paper of 1995 which represented a victory of the education community over its external critics. On the surface, it also constituted a victory for the curriculum development movement of the 1970s in terms of the structure and language of curriculum provision at national level. Whether it would affect real change remained to be seen.

CHAPTER 5

Three Moments – Three: Future Positions

Introduction

By the start of the twenty-first century, a new orthodoxy had come to dominate education policies internationally. While local characteristics still visibly characterised national education systems, the commonality of policy was established through 'vernacular interpretation' (Ozga and Lingard, 2007) or 'social refraction' (Goodson, 2004) of globalised imperatives. Thus the 'standards-based educational reform' movement, most strikingly captured in the major USA *No Child Left Behind* Act (2001), became the dominant model for educational reform internationally. This approach to education reform can be seen as a re-emergence of the outcomes-based education movement that flourished in an earlier form in the USA in the fifties and early sixties, and more recently in a more generalised manner through the growth of such phenomena as national frameworks of qualifications (Elliot, 2001; Guile 2006).

Increasingly, policy developments were driven by the 'external relations' (Goodson, 2004, p. 22) of educational change and these external mandates reflected political concerns of economic competitiveness. The pervasive instrumentalism of education policy was established in the mechanisms and structures of policy generation. In England and Wales, for instance, the Schools Council, which in the 1970s had sponsored teacher autonomy and school-based curriculum development, had been replaced by the School Curriculum Development Council (SCDC) as its autonomy had been curtailed in the 1980s; in turn, the SCDC evolved into the National Curriculum Council (NCC) in the 1990s, charged with overseeing the introduction of the new centrally-prescribed curriculum. By the turn of the new century, the NCC had been reconstituted as the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), explicitly linking curriculum with specific credentials and defined instrumental outcomes.

Across the international landscape, upper secondary education had become a particular focus for development, with consistent patterns of emphasis on core skills, work-related

learning and citizenship emerging alongside traditional academic subjects, such as mother-tongue and mathemetics (Le Métais, 2003). The dominant concerns of governments, however, were focused on skills development and on economic utility. Green (1997, p. 183) notes:

> In all western states, there has been a steady rise in individualist and consumerist values and identities, and with it, the gradual erosion of collective and community identities and beliefs. This has been enhanced, in many states, by the advance of neo-liberal ideologies and the encroachment of the market into every area of life… National economic goals are still held inviolate and education is instrumentally geared towards these ends.

In Ireland, these trends may have been less overt than in other jurisdictions, yet they still provided the wider context within which education policy was developed. The late 1990s saw a concentrated burst of activity in relation to national education policy. Following the NEC report (1994) and the White Paper (1995), an unprecedented wave of education legislation was introduced, including the Universities Act (1997), the Education Act (1998), the Qualifications Act (1998) and Educational Welfare Act (2001). Among the significant results of this at the turn of the 21st century was the establishment through the Education Act of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) on a statutory basis.

One of the first initiatives of the new Council was to address the future development of senior cycle policy. The reforms of the 1990s had produced a senior cycle provision in schools incorporating four programmes, including three orientations of the Leaving Certificate (LC):

- A discrete Transition Year (TY) programme, as an option for students who had completed the Junior Certificate programme. TY was a nationally recognised but non-certificated programme, with structure and content devised at local school level. Schools offering and students taking TY tended to be drawn from the more affluent sectors of society. The assumed transition was to the two-year Leaving Certificate programme, on completion of TY. Initial research indicates that participation in TY tended to correlate with ultimately higher examination grades in the Leaving Certificate and that students, teachers, parents and employers had developed overall

- The Leaving Certificate (Established) programme (LC), a two-year, high stakes examination programme, regarded as the flagship of Irish education, a gateway to higher education (through the points system, calculated on the basis of examination performance in six LC subjects) and employment. The parenthesised 'established', initially coined for purposes of convenience, had come to have a deeper significance in terms of its implication that other programmes were not formally 'established' in the education system. A report on the controversial 'points system', which is based on LC examinations, recommended that the curriculum structure of the programme be expanded and enhanced (Ireland, 1999).

- The Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP): a vocational variation of the LC, it was characterised by a requirement to select designated subjects of a vocational nature (including business and technological subjects) as well as 'Link Modules' in Preparation for Work, Work Experience and Enterprise Education. The LCVP was described in its early dissemination as 'Leaving Certificate Plus', meaning that it retained all the advantages of the traditional programme along with the added value of the vocational dimension. Higher education institutes recognised the Link Modules for points purposes, but the perception of it being a lower-status form of LC persisted. While the ambition was for LCVP to be a full programme imbued with an enterprise ethic across all subjects, in practice the programme became defined only by its Link Modules, a quasi-subject alongside other conventional LC subjects (DES 1998; Granville 1998).

- The Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA): this was the most radical innovation within the suite of curriculum reforms introduced in the 1990s. The programme was derived from the developmental experience of the curriculum projects based in the CDU Dublin and CDC Shannon. In its modular structure, project-oriented content and accumulated credit system, the LCA differed fundamentally from the other LC programmes. However, it still suffered in terms of parity of esteem and there was no direct progression route to third level education available for students on completion of the LCA (Gleeson and Granville 1996; Boldt 1998; DES 2000).

This was a significantly developed senior cycle provision as compared to the unitary provision up to the 1990s, when the established LC was the only nationally recognised programme available in schools. However, the regime was very uneven in its application. Of approximately 770 post-primary schools at the turn of the century, the LC (Established) was offered in all, while TY was offered in some 500 schools, LCVP in about 480 and LCA in approximately 200. An annual cohort of about 60,000 students sat the LC (Established) examination; some 30,000 took LCVP and about 7,000 the LCA. Annual participation in TY hovered at about 30,000 (NCCA, 2002).

Proposals for the Future of Senior Cycle Education in Ireland

In 2002, the NCCA published *Developing Senior Cycle Education: Consultative Paper on Issues and Options*, which set out consciously to 'revisit, review and refine the policy of the NCCA' on senior cycle as published in its 1993 policy document *Curriculum and Assessment Policy – Towards the New Century* (p. 2). It was presented as a response to the recently published report of the Commission on the Points System (Ireland 1999) which had suggested that the focus of reform should be on the nature of senior cycle education provision rather than the points system for entry to higher education itself (NCCA, 2002, foreword). The new document located the senior cycle debate in an international context and considered various options for a development strategy, ranging from maintaining the status quo to reconstructing the entire provision.

That consultative paper was followed by what the NCCA called an exercise in foresight planning: *Developing Senior Cycle Education: Directions for Development* (2003) projected onto the year 2010 a set of imagined structures and procedures as a consultative tool to focus attention on potential medium to long-term developments. The document attempted to use that foresight as a means of identifying steps and stages that would be required in the interim period.

A distinguishing feature of the NCCA consultative process of 2002 to 2005 was the use of web-based resources and techniques to augment the standard publications. Thus, the

various consultative and discussion documents were published simultaneously on the web and online questionnaires were utilised to allow feedback in respect of the proposals.

After this extended and complex process of consultation, the NCCA made a two-stage submission of advice to the Minister for Education and Science. In June 2004, the NCCA published its *Overview* of *Proposals for the Future of Senior Cycle Education in Ireland*; then in April 2005, the second part of the advice was presented as a fuller account of the proposals, setting out more detailed recommendations on implementation. The unusual step of presenting an Overview ten months before the substance of the proposals had echoes of the unorthodox publication of the Green Paper, with its preface published separately from the paper itself. While pragmatic and political factors might have influenced the earlier experience (see Chapter Four above), in the case of the NCCA this disjunction was rationalised as a manifestation of one of the integral principles of the proposals, that of 'rolling review'. Thus the fuller documentation was described as 'the advancing of more developed proposals rather than their definitive presentation for adoption' (2005, p. 10).

The proposals to the Minister were presented 'as a response to the challenge of inclusion and equity and to the challenge faced by many education systems in the developed world – how to ensure that an education system originally designed to meet the needs of an elite few can be re-shaped to meet the needs of a broader, more diverse group of learners' (NCCA, 2005, p. 5). A further point of rationale was presented: 'equally the proposals will provide greater opportunities for exceptionally able students ... to demonstrate their abilities and enhance their performance' (p. 6).

The NCCA proposed a suite of programmes constructed around four curriculum components – subjects, short courses, transition units and generic key skills, the latter embedded in each type of course. These programmes would be provided over a two or a three year period, and would comprise a combination of subjects, short courses and transition units. Subjects and short courses would be assessed within the ambit of an expanded Leaving Certificate examination, while Transition Units, derived from the

ethos and practice of the transition year programme, would not be formally assessed for certification purposes but would be recorded on an overarching certificate of Senior Cycle Education. Certain requirements for examination and matriculation purposes were also specified.

These curriculum and certification proposals were not new. The new 'big idea' that underpinned the Overview and Proposals was the centrality of engaging with the culture of the school. This was manifested as a recurring theme, expressed in different ways in the course of the consultation process including the significance of teaching and learning approaches, of class sizes, of self directed learning and of school timetables in the implementation of proposed changes. In all these matters, the impetus for development was placed within the realm of school culture. In particular, the proposed model of change development and implementation was presented as a significant new departure, within a 'slow, steady and well-resourced path of change':

> The 'slow and steady' approach puts the school at the centre of the change process and the teachers and the students at the heart. The traditional approach to change has been to 'develop' then 'implement' the change. Teachers and schools become the 'implementers' of change. (2004, p. 9)

The NCCA was now proposing a new approach, one in which 'schools and teachers actively shape and lead rather than simply respond to change' (p.9). A chapter in the detailed 2005 publication, dedicated to a new model of supporting change, noted the particular welcome that the education sector had given to the NCCA proposals to 'do the change differently' (p' 65). The political and professional implications of such an approach, it was noted, would require a continuation and development of the partnership approach, and associated mechanisms, as a vehicle for negotiation.

The response of the Minister was extremely cool. This response was first noted in the media, at a time when the Minister was in China with a governmental delegation. The Irish Times and RTE radio carried reports from China, in which she commented that she felt that the NCCA was proposing a 'Rolls-Royce' model which was inappropriate and unrealistic for the immediate future. The somewhat patronising tone of the Minister's comments was heightened by the long-distance medium of dismissal.

The Minister provided a more formal response to the NCCA by way of a letter (29 June 2005) to the Chief Executive. She noted her strong approval of the stated NCCA strategy to build on the strengths of the current system. She reacted less positively to more ambitious NCCA aims for greater inclusion and equity, for a more adult culture in senior cycle schooling and for planning for lifelong learning. This plan, she claimed,

> … points to change on a scale which can only be effected on a phased basis. Such change would have to be implemented over a significant period of time having regard not only to the potential disruptive effects, logistical factors and the cost involved but also to the capacity of teachers, students, parents, schools and the public at large to move with the changes (Hanafin, 2005).

The Minister went on to point out her own priorities, which included 'the necessity to maintain public confidence in the education and examinations systems, to provide all our students with an educational experience which enables them to fulfil their potential as individuals and as members of society, and to ensure that a reform programme takes full account of the capacity of the system to respond and adapt.' The Minister indicated her resistance to certain specific elements of the NCCA proposals. These included her wish to retain the Transition Year as a 'stand-alone year providing dedicated time and space' for personal growth and development without concurrent examination requirements, her concerns about short-courses in respect of target groups, content, teaching and assessment implications and points weighting. She suggested that work on short-courses be deferred until after a review of existing subjects.

The NCCA had played for high stakes:

> The central principle of all or nothing is fundamental to the vision. Each decision, each action has a critical relationship with another. If one falls, all fall. (NCCA, 2004, p.10).

While the NCCA endeavoured to place as constructive and positive an interpretation as possible on the situation, the words of the Minister undoubtedly put the brake on the senior cycle development plans.

Discourse features

The chronology of evolving curriculum senior cycle policy can be seen as periodic reiteration of the same concepts and constructs. Indeed, this pattern of recurring policy discourse can be traced back to policy considerations of the early 1960s and 1970s. The Minister for Education in 1963, Dr. Patrick Hillery proposed that an expanded provision of senior cycle education could be accommodated within the new comprehensive ideal that he was pursuing (Randles, 1975). Similarly, the thrust of the Intermediate Certificate Examination (ICE, 1975) report suggested a reconfiguring of the junior and senior cycles, with a new certificate to be provided at the end of the junior cycle which would provide for more structured and specialised provision at senior cycle.

The discourse of change

If calls for change were ubiquitous and unremarkable in the mid-1990s, they had become much more discreet if not silent some ten years later. The NCCA proposals are quite defensive in their rationale for change: 'Not changing, leaving things as they are, is not an option. It is a temptation (NCCA, 2004, p. 8) … [The proposals] do not involve change for change's sake (2005, p. 5). In contrast, the Minister's references to 'change for the sake of change' as noted in her radio interview (RTE, June 2005) signal the underlying conservatism that underlay her reaction.

The discourse of flexibility

Flexibility, including the validation of local school initiatives, was a prominent issue in the first moment under consideration in this work (see Chapter Three). The issue of validation of locally generated curriculum initiatives had begun to slide down the agenda by the time of the CEB final report in 1987. The concept was almost entirely absent from the documents analysed in 'moment two' except for the treatment of the Junior Cycle Schools Programme in *Towards the New Century*. However, it reappears quite strongly in the NCCA 2005 Proposals document, specifically in relation to the development of Transition Units (TUs). Specific plans were proposed by the NCCA to validate a large range of TUs and further, to 'explore models for the validation of *schools* to develop their own TUs. Validation of TUs developed by other agencies in consultation with schools

will also be considered' (p. 39). Indeed, the Minister in her response welcomed what she called the 'greater standardisation' of such units and their validation (Hanafin, 2005).

There is an irony in the reappearance of validation as a curriculum issue, however. The original concept of validation was a means, within a flexible curriculum, of allowing for diversity of approach, autonomy of design and variation in provision. The discourse associated with validation in 2005 however is dominated by concerns of control – 'a common template' is envisaged by NCCA for construction of TUs for validation and the Minister welcomes the 'greater standardisation' inherent in these proposals.

The discourse of consultation

Another theme to re-emerge in the 2004/05 NCCA documents is that of *consultation*. The NCCA emphasises the importance of its consultation process again in 2004, noting its briefings for organisations, issues seminars, bilateral meetings with the education partners, an online survey, a senior cycle forum, a virtual forum and school-based research (2004, p. 3) as the basis for its set of proposals. A confidential internal *Report on the Consultative Process - Meetings, Seminars and Submissions*, prepared by the NCCA executive in September 2003, noted the 'new voices' that were brought into the loop, notably community and voluntary pillar and a network of organisations convened through the Combat Poverty Agency. The internal report concluded that 'as there were many voices, there are many messages … but the level of participation in the consultative process underlined one fundamental principle supported by all. Education matters' (NCCA, 2003b, p. 32).

Repeated reference is made to this consultation process in the course of the publications, as a means to validate and substantiate proposals and recommendations. This is an echo of the moral consensus that the CEB claimed on the basis of its own innovative consultations (see Chapter Three).

The NCCA has always drawn its political strength from its representative composition, presenting its advice to the Minister of the day as the consensus of views of all the key

players, the education partners. NCCA critics and commentators have compared this form of representation with that of the earlier body, the Interim CEB which was not formally representative (Burke, 1994; Gleeson 2000, 2004; Granville, 2004; Sugrue, 2004). A recurring criticism has been that vested interests in education have gained a control over the process of curriculum design, a form of 'provider capture' that is inclined to be exclusive and self-serving. However, in 2004/5 the NCCA presents its consultative process as significantly more widely based than the 'usual suspects' and thus more democratically significant. The implication is that this wider base of consultation establishes a validity for the NCCA which the DES, even with its own experience of consultation with the established education partners, does not possess.

While the substance of the curriculum discourse does not seem to have advanced, developed or changed in more than a quarter century, the style and register of that discourse has evolved. For instance, the early documents in 'moment one' were all brief and accessible to a general readership: *In Our Schools,* the final report of the Interim CEB, comprised only 60 pages of A5 size (of which only seven dealt with senior cycle) and quite accessible for a wider, non-professional audience. The key NCCA document of 'moment two' *Curriculum and Assessment Policy towards the New Century*, was also only 62 pages, albeit of A4 size, of which, again only seven dealt explicitly with senior cycle. The 2005 proposal for the *Future Development of Senior Cycle Education in Ireland*, consists of 100 A4 pages entirely committed to senior cycle and comprising quite dense and detailed treatment of curriculum structures. This allied to the thirty-seven pages of the separately published but inherently connected *Overview* meant that the audience was a much more defined and specialist one than had been the case in earlier iterations.

Conclusion

The establishment of the NCCA as a statutory body through the Education Act 1998 was a formal vindication of its historical development over twenty years. The Interim CEB set up in 1984 was intended to be the forerunner of a statutory body which would be charged with running the state examinations as well as designing the curriculum. The failure to

establish such a statutory board was seen to be a fatal weakness in the new body (Breathnach 1995; Gleeson 2000). However, the work of the NCCA through the late 1980s and 1990s had achieved a recognition that belied its non-statutory status, and made calls for its establishment almost irresistible when the Education Act came to pass. This position was a reflection on the one hand of the quality of its work in shaping curriculum policy at primary and post-primary levels, and on the other hand, of the political power of the education partners, notably the teacher unions, who greatly valued their representation on the NCCA and on all its sub-committees.

The NCCA itself has grown dramatically from an organisation that had three full-time professional staff and three administrative staff members in 1985, to one with twenty-two full time professional and twelve administrative staff in 2008, together with an extended network of up to nineteen part-time or seconded professional staff, as well as an extensive headquarters in Dublin, a second full-time office in Portlaoise and office facilities in Cork, Limerick and Galway (NCCA 2008).

Even as a statutory board, however, the NCCA remains an advisory body, not an executive agency. As such, the Minister and the DES still hold the final call on policy decisions. In this context, it may be that the inherently conservative disposition of the DES is always likely to resist radical policy initiatives, unless such initiatives have the support of a powerful coalition of political forces, both at ministerial level and the level of the education partners. The case proposed by the NCCA in 2004/5 was based on the comprehensive consultative process of the previous few years. Yet, the proposals found no animated champions among the education partners, let alone at the level of the Minister for Education. While the proposals were indeed formally supported by those education partners, there was no passionate commitment to them apparent within the teacher unions or the other partners.

Machiavelli in *The Prince* (1513) wrote of the difficulties of achieving change: 'There is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success, than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things'. According to

Machiavelli, those who prospered under the old regime will naturally resist vigorously any change or threat to their status, while those in favour of change tend to be only lukewarm in their commitment, for reasons of fear, anxiety and lack of confidence. The experience of educational change gives credence to this analysis.

In making its substantive recommendations, the NCCA advice to the Minister strikes almost the same declamatory tone in 2004/5 as it had in 1993: instead of using the conditional conventions of 'should' or 'might', the NCCA tended to use more assertive imperatives: 'will'. While these imperatives are softened by an introductory note that says that 'it is envisaged that senior cycle will be developed along the following lines', the main body of bulleted text that summarises the core policy positions is unequivocal (2004, p. 13). Thus:

- o The option of taking a two-year or a three-year senior cycle *will* remain…
- o The restructured senior cycle curriculum *will* comprise …
- o Transition Year and the Leaving Certificate (established) *will* gradually merge…
- o The LCVP in its current form *will* be discontinued …
- o The Leaving Certificate Applied *will* be retained …(italics added).

The cool if not negative response of the Minister to the 2005/5 advice echoed that of an earlier Minister and her Department in 1993. Relations between a dominant government department and an executive or advisory agency will invariably ebb and flow in terms of leadership and authority: a constant strain is bound to exist even at times of mutual support. The impact and significance of language tone and register in affecting this relationship should not be underestimated.

A key difference between the 1993 and 2005 experiences, of course, is that while on both occasions the Minister at the time responded very coolly to the NCCA proposals, on the earlier occasion the Minister actually adopted the recommendations. This differentiated response is examined in more detail in Chapter 7 below. However, before that analysis is undertaken, a different perspective on the curriculum experience is introduced.

The next chapter provides an auto-ethnographic narrative of the researcher's professional experience over the period under review. The objective is to uncover and revisit the roots of the curriculum development movement in Ireland which provided the platform for development over the past three decades.

CHAPTER 6:

The Palimpsest, the Crit and Sedimented History:

an auto-ethnographic reflection

Introduction

This chapter provides a parallel narrative to, and a complementary perspective for analysis of, the three moments of study in the development of curriculum policy in Ireland from the late 1970s. The chapter attempts to place the foregoing chapters in another light, that of the professional career experience of the present author. His experience mirrors the policy evolution process under scrutiny, to the extent that he was an active agent and participant at each of the critical moments.

Specifically, at the first moment, he was personally on the cusp of the shift in curriculum development activity from periphery to centre, moving from a position as a project leader in the Curriculum Development Unit, one of the leading nodes of curriculum innovation, to that of Assistant Chief Executive of the newly established Interim Curriculum and Examinations Board (CEB). At the second moment, he was still in that position in the successor body to the CEB, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), and centrally involved in the major national curriculum initiatives that occurred at that time, the mid-90s. Finally, at the third moment, he had moved on to a new position in academe as Head of the Faculty of Education in the National College of Art and Design (NCAD), while continuing to be an active participant in the process of the NCCA as a member of its Senior Cycle Committee and as Chair of its Arts and Humanities Board of Studies. He has had a defined role in respect of most of the key policy documents within the moments under review, as summarised in table 1:

Moment	Document	Role
1	*Issues and Structures in Education* (1984)	No authorial role; indirect role as curriculum developer
	In Our Schools: a framework for curriculum and assessment (1986)	Co-author, editor
	Senior Cycle: Development and Directions (1986)	Principal author
2	Green Paper: *Education for a Changing World* (1992)	No role
	Curriculum and Assessment Policy: Towards the New Century (1993)	Principal author
	White Paper: *Charting Our Education Future* (1995)	Indirect role as source
3	*Developing Senior Cycle Education: consultative paper on Issues and Options* (2002)	Indirect role as member of advisory committee
	Developing Senior Cycle Education: Directions for Development (2003)	Indirect role as member of advisory committee
	Proposals for the Future Development of Senior Cycle Education in Ireland (2004/5)	Indirect role as member of advisory committee

Table 1: Personal Role Narrative

The dual positions of the author in this chapter are those of a participant reflecting on his engagement as well as a researcher analysing his field. In this respect, the author is in a position similar but not identical to that of Luke (2007) who describes the 'halfie' ethnography, the narrative of 'in-betweeness' of his experience as an educational administrator in Queensland, Australia. Luke challenges the traditional perception that sees an irreconcilable divide between theory and practice. In contrast, he sees complementary relationships occurring in the zone between critical research on the one hand, and state power and bureaucracy on the other, when academics shift from the sheltered academy to the realm of power, policy design and implementation.

Luke (2007) wonders why we apply nuanced research approaches to the analysis of classroom interactions but tend to assume that policy formation is static, consisting of a dominant voice rather than discourse-generated zones, and underestimating the

significance of exchange of capital and face to face dynamics. He rejects a position that defines one as either an insider or an outsider in the realms of critical research and policy formation, a position similarly adopted by Taylor (2004) who advocates the use of critical research strategies for those involved in state power structures as much as for those engaged in empirical research.

This thesis therefore deploys a blend of two main approaches: firstly, the judicious use of critical discourse analysis (CDA) to interrogate the key texts that have been identified, and secondly, the narrative voice of the author as a participant in the events and processes being described. Lyotard notes that narrative and exposition, scenario and 'science' are co-articulations of power and discourse (1984). This rationalisation, also utilised by Luke, serves as a frame within which the personal experience of the author is matched to the process of analysis.

Narrative theory suggests that private narratives can be interpreted, reinterpreted and represented within a changing public memory. The narrative expressed in this chapter attempts to salvage a concept and meaning of curriculum development that has been lost in the conventional reading of Irish curriculum policy. It challenges a public memory that accepts current curriculum structures and practices as being the incontestable, natural and common-sense configuration of schooling policy. It tries to identify the sequence of developments that has brought about the current situation while proposing that this was not, nor does it remain, the only possible outcome.

The palimpsest and the 'crit'

The subject matter of interpretive narrative research has been described as 'meaningful biographical experience' (Denzin 2008, p. 121). The auto-ethnographic narrative presented in this chapter has been further refined by two specifically arts-related constructs:

o *the palimpsest:* a palimpsest is a parchment, a manuscript page from a scroll or book, or a tablet that has been scraped off and used again. This is used as a metaphor and as an almost literal manifestation of the process of uncovering the

texts of curriculum policy. Two pieces of auto-ethnographic writing by the researcher, which broadly coincide in time with the official texts selected for analysis at each of the first two 'moments' of scrutiny, have been chosen as exemplification of the palimpsestic or sedimented evolution of curriculum policy texts.

o *the crit:* this aspect of visual arts pedagogy involves student artists presenting their emerging work to peers with reference to their sources and influences, their intentionality and aspiration and ultimately, their attempts at realising their intentions. This chapter is presented in analogous terms as a depiction of the sources and intentionality of the author in his practice as a curriculum developer over the past thirty years. The approach adopted is that of Ricoeur's (1992) 'oneself as another' with the crit conceptualised as a reflective engagement between the author as researcher and earlier iterations of the same author as curriculum developer.

At the start of his novel, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (1980), Milan Kundera describes a photograph taken on the 21st February 1948 in Prague, where Vladimír Clementis, the Czech Foreign Minister, stands next to President Klement Gottwald. As they stood in the cold, the solicitous Clementis gave his fur cap to Gottwald to keep his head warm. The photograph was duly taken and was widely distributed by the official state propaganda agencies. Some years later, after Clementis was charged with treason in 1950, he was erased from the photograph by the same propaganda machine: a new version of the image continued to be used, without the now disgraced Clementis. Gottwald is still wearing the cap that Clementis had loaned him on the balcony where they stood in the cold. All that remains of Clementis in the doctored photograph, is the irony of his cap on the head of Gottwald: a political palimpsest of a literal kind.

The palimpsest in history was usually a pragmatic rather than an ideological act: cost or unavailability of vellum material forced scribes to adopt such material as was to hand. Sometimes, however, religious, political or cultural factors might also have influenced the choice of material to be erased and super-scribed. Classically, such a manuscript

would have been cut from its binding, the original inscribed writing would have been erased and new writing inscribed at right angles to the erased script. While this process was most explicitly noted and recorded within the disciplines of archeology and paleography, it is both a powerful metaphor and a literal process that has increasingly been adopted in other disciplines, including architecture, art, history and medicine. It also features, ironically or otherwise, in politics and literature.

In the visual arts, the palimpsest has been adopted as a way of working by some artists. For instance, Richard Galpin deconstructs his own photographs by using a scalpel precisely to strip sections of the emulsion covering-layer of the image to reveal a new construct. In describing his understanding of the process, Galpin (1998) defines the palimpsest process in terms of three stages – the initial writing, the erasure, and then the rewriting. Each of these stages is significant in his work, though he notes that contemporary practice often elides the second stage, 'writing directly over the top of the old text, without an erasure'.

Galpin's description of his own art-making is redolent of a more general and less self-conscious approach to presentation within the crit. Within the crit, a student-artist will frequently display a chronology, a sequence of evolving treatments of a recurring concern, a problem or a theme. Most of these treatments will be unresolved and unrealised, some abandoned and some morphed into other ideas and concepts. Frequently, the work emerging for critical scrutiny bears little or no relationship to the original starting point. The apparent disconnections and perceived randomness of unrelated phenomena within the concept of the palimpsest, has indeed been cited as an appropriate basis for postmodern art education (Powell, 2006, Efland et al, 1996).

In one of the crits observed as part of the research for this thesis[14], a painting student had presented her work in relation to her evolving concerns. She had been working on a theme involving relationships, emotional commitments and shared traumas. An important

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[14] The author has been present at studio crits in the Education Faculty NCAD over the past number of years, and specifically attended crits for MFA students in the Faculty of Fine Art in January 2009 for purposes of the present research.

early reference point for her work had been a series of sketches of dogs, gestural drawings hinting at some of the emotional tug that dogs as pets exert on humans. In her evolving, highly abstracted work, some of the traces of these early studies remained, but they were challenged by her peers, in terms both of their appropriateness and their resolution. 'Lose the dogs' was the pithy comment of one of her tutors, suggesting she erase the remaining vestiges of that line of thinking and visualizing. It was advice of a palimpsestic nature, erasing work that had been visibly significant: it would now be redundant visually but would remain important in its contribution to the evolution of the art project.

Many artists have utilised variations of this palimpsestic approach, sometimes to make a statement about the process of art itself. Brian Dillon (2006), writing in the context of Joseph Kosuth's work in the Tate Gallery, examines the role of erasure in art making:

> Erasure is never merely a matter of making things disappear: there is always some detritus strewn about in the aftermath, some bruising to the surface from which word or image has been removed, some reminder of the violence done to make the world look new again. Whether rubbed away, crossed out or reinscribed, the rejected entity has a habit of returning, ghostlike: if only in the marks that usurp its place and attest to its passing. But writing, for example, is already, long before lead hits pulp, a question of erasure, an art of leaving out. Every painting, said Picasso, is a sum of destructions: the artist builds and demolishes in the same instant. Which is perhaps what Jasper Johns had in mind when he said of Robert Rauschenberg's *Erased de Kooning Drawing* (1953) that it embodied an "additive subtraction": after a month's sporadic destruction, and 40 spent erasers, what is left is a surface startlingly alive, active, *palimpsestic*.

As a process, this evokes Foucault's concept of the archeology of knowledge. As Sarah Dillon (2005, p. 253) points outs out, Foucault explains that the task of the historian is 'the making visible of what was previously unseen' either by magnifying the detail of analysis or by 'addressing oneself to a layer of material which hitherto had no pertinence for history and which had not been recognised as having any moral, aesthetic, political or historical value'. For Foucault (1980, p. 82), archaeology involves bringing to light

> a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborate: naive knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity.

Ricoeur (1991a) describes a similar process in his promotion of the use of narrative in research as a form of 'sedimented history', sifting through material whose genesis is unknown or has been obscured by the over-writing of subsequent histories.

These inter-related concepts of the palimpsest, the crit and sedimented history inform the auto-ethnographic narrative of the present work. Indeed, the critical discourse analysis of the official texts examined in the previous three chapters can also be seen as a form of scraping, of erasure of those texts to see what lies beneath.

The personal texts introduced in the narrative in this chapter can be interpreted as the faint tracings of earlier texts and meanings which have subsequently been forgotten – the ironic cap remaining in the curriculum photograph. There is something especially evocative in the practice of palimpsestic writing at right angles to the original text. In the present exercise, this can be seen as a metaphor for the 'disconnect', conscious or otherwise, between the official policy documents under analysis and the original dispositions of the curriculum development movement as evident in the personal writings that have been uncovered or rediscovered in the course of this research.

Critical disclosures through an auto-ethnographic approach

The present chapter aims to provide an insight into the ambition, motivation and aspiration of the curriculum development movement as formulated by the early pilot projects of the 1970s and the extent to which that was maintained, changed or negated in the evolution of curriculum policy over the subsequent three decades. It attempts to do this through reviewing the experience of one person (this writer) who was centrally involved, for good or bad, in that process. The selection of texts for this purpose mirrors the text-base of the CDA approach in the preceding chapters.

A small body of literature has emerged on the domain of curriculum policy development in Ireland in recent years. Among the most significant elements in this literature have been works by Gleeson (2000), Sugrue (2004), Callan (2006) and Trant (2007). Because the Irish education community is so small, it is interesting to note that most writers on

curriculum policy have been, to a greater or lesser extent, active participants in the processes they are researching. However, while this engagement is always acknowledged, it is rarely used as a research base, still less as a narrative to reflect on the curriculum development process itself. A notable exception to this, however, has been Trant who describes his methodology as 'theoretical analysis illumined by narrative' (2007, p. 6):

> We might be disposed to take stories more seriously … We dream in stories and we remember, hope, despair, learn and love through stories. Narrative is our primary means of making sense of what would otherwise be a chaotic world (p. 7).

Trant was an early pioneer in curriculum development in Irish schools in the 1960s and 1970s. His professional practice was almost entirely devoted to local initiatives; his concern with national policy was almost entirely restricted to how best that policy might serve, or at least facilitate, his local projects. His book is a reflection from retirement upon a lifetime of educational innovation.

The reception given to Trant's book, however, was indicative of a certain disjunction between the cultures represented by Trant and that of the established academic education community. This was exemplified by the discussion that took place on a broadcast radio programme (RTE, 2008)[15]. A panel of three distinguished reviewers noted that the work was 'idiosyncratic' and almost without reference to national policy evolution. The difficulty the reviewers had in coming to terms with the concerns embedded in Trant's work epitomised the cultural gap between the localised curriculum initiatives with which he was associated and national systems and structures for which he had disdain (Trant 2007, 1997). By contrast, the reviewers, especially Hyland and Coolahan, appeared to be in thrall to the new processes of curriculum definition epitomised by the CEB and NCCA. The story that Trant told in his book was a narrative of another experience, one that was inherently uninterested in, if not actually opposed to, the 'curriculum politics' that emerged in the 1990s. A recurring critique by both Hyland and Coolahan is that Trant failed to acknowledge the work that had been achieved first by the CEB and subsequently

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[15] RTE Radio 1, 24 September 2008, *Off the Shelf* presented by Andy O'Mahony, produced by Bernadette Comerford, with reviewers Prof Dermot Moran, Prof Áine Hyland and Prof John Coolahan. The latter two were perhaps the most eminent education academics in the country for the period in question; the former is a professor of philosophy.

by the NCCA. This is literally true: Trant conspicuously refrains from doing so. This is entirely consistent with his views on such national processes; his conception of curriculum was entirely as a professional activity at local level.

The gap in understanding displayed through that radio programme, even at a level of shared understanding of the term 'curriculum', is a manifestation of one of the underpinning themes of this thesis. The narrative that follows in the next section engages directly with the issues that arose in that programme. The personal and professional experiences of this writer personify that very gap in understanding and are bound up with the shift in locus of curriculum matters from the periphery to the centre[16].

The personal engagement of this researcher in the events under analysis requires careful treatment. Luke (2003) remarks on the difficulties in respect of objectivity, critical distance and insights inherent in any dual function of activist and researcher, referring to

> … a shunting between research and policy formation, between critique and reconstruction, with all of the issues such moves beg about points of possible appropriation and innovation, collusion and collaboration, contradiction and historical movement... Moves into state power and policy formation make for destabilising and irritating, risky and unpredictable shifts between forms of life, between discourses, between paradigmatic and professional communities, and they involve consequential decisions about our own life and career pathways as academics and educational researchers ... movements through and across the traditionally bifurcated social fields of academy and bureaucracy, research and policy can construct new narratives (pp. 85, 86).

The adoption of an auto-ethnographic narrative in this chapter is an attempt to navigate this territory and to interrogate, if not subvert, the dominant ethic of performativity in policy-making and so-called 'evidence-based research' in academic work. Narrative has been suggested as a means of achieving such an outcome:

> One starting point might be the remembrance of our histories, the valorisation of narrative and the acknowledgement that we have been here before. Subjective memory might prove a worthwhile adversary of performativity, or at least provide a site for resistance' (Owen, 2007, p. 30).

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[16] The reviewers on more than one occasion note that there is only one reference to the CEB in Trant's book. On page 228, the CEB is noted in the context of the present writer's departure from the CDU to take up a position in the new body.

Similarly, in acknowledging the importance of personal experience in academic research, Ball (2006, p. 692) quotes Foucault:

> Each time I have attempted to do theoretical work it has been on the basis of elements from my experience – always in relation to processes that I saw taking place around me. It is in fact because I thought I saw something cracked, dully jarring or disfunctioning in things I saw in the institutions in which I dealt with my relations with others, that I undertook a particular piece of work, several fragments of autobiography.

Narratives, it has been suggested (Dickinson and Erben, 1995), have four fundamental features. Firstly, a narrative organises actions and events in such a way as to make meaning. Secondly, at a deeper level, a narrative expresses the human experience of temporality: Ricoeur distinguishes between a mere chronicle of events in sequence and a narrative with a plot and as such a construction of meaning through experience. Thirdly, a narrative blurs the distinction between, and the relative significance of, real events and fiction; this is a cautionary note for both narrator and reader, recognising the vested interest of the authorial voice.

Finally, narrative is expressed through language, and in this respect the language focus of discourse analysis adopted in the earlier chapters resonates with the first-person narrative language of the rest of this chapter.

Nature of the arts-based enquiry

This section is a self reflective analysis of my own experiences at or about the three moments of scrutiny described elsewhere. As a means of addressing this, I have adopted a similar technique to that used in the discourse analysis – the selection of texts that correlate more or less chronologically with those of the official texts. In this case however, the texts in question are written by me in a personal capacity. They differ from other writings that I produced at those moments, in that they are explicitly personal and not written either for official policy purposes (as an official of the state) or for academic publication.

The first is a short paper entitled *How Many Bricks in the Wall?,* written in 1979, shortly after my first taking up appointment as a project leader in the CDU, some few years before the first moment addressed in Chapter Three. The second is an unpublished paper *Blood on the Tracks: Curriculum Development as a Subversive Activity*, written in 1996 when I was still in my post as Assistant Chief Executive of the NCCA, shortly after 'moment two' addressed in Chapter Four[17]. The third moment is counter-pointed in this personal narrative by the present thesis itself, informed by two invited presentations I made, the first at the 21st anniversary of the establishment of the NCCA (Granville, 2008), the second at the 20th anniversary of the establishment of Youthreach, Ireland's education and training programme for early school leavers (Granville, 2009). The commemorative nature of these events allowed for more personal reflectivity than would usually be the case, and as such they mirror the contemporaneous moment of scrutiny in this thesis.

How Many Bricks in the Wall?

In 1974, I was a postgraduate student in UCD, looking for a post as a teacher. After a number of unanswered letters and fruitless visits to schools, I was offered a part-time post, teaching in Ballyfermot Vocational School, a City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee (CDVEC) school. Although my timetable specified my responsibilities as a teacher of Irish, History and Geography, I was immediately immersed in a new subject called 'Humanities'. This was a new programme, providing an interdisciplinary curriculum for junior cycle pupils, integrating English, History, Geography and Civics. An integrated science programme, ISCIP, was also provided in the school. These programmes, consciously designed to provide continuity from the integrated methodology of the new primary curriculum, were co-ordinated by the CDU across a network of CDVEC schools.

In retrospect, it was a hugely valuable introduction to the teaching profession for a beginning teacher. Two factors in particular stand out: the large, volatile and opinionated

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[17] The committed reader might choose to read these papers in the appendices to this thesis before completing the rest of this chapter.

staff in the school (over one hundred teachers – the school was one of the largest in the country at the time) within which were many factions; and the regular meetings and engagements with teachers in other schools through the facility of the CDU which operated as a fulcrum for the programme, facilitating teacher meetings and in-service courses for the new Humanities curriculum.

I spent two years teaching in that school, and a further three teaching in prison education and in the Liberties Vocational School, another innovative school. In 1979 I applied for and was appointed as leader of a new project in the CDU: the Early School Leavers Project. This project was part of the *Transition from School to Adult and Working Life* network of projects funded by the European Community at the time. It was one of three such projects established in Ireland – the other two were located in the Shannon CDC and in North Mayo (Ireland, 1984).

Quite early in my new role, I spoke at a conference organised by the National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI): a small booklet, *Challenge for Young Ireland*, containing some of the proceedings of that conference, was subsequently published by the NYCI (Metcalf, 1980). My short paper was entitled 'How many Bricks in the Wall?' a reference to a popular song of the time. The short biographical note at the top of the paper stresses that 'the views expressed here are strictly his own', a cautionary note reflecting my lack of confidence[18]. It is a slight and utterly unremarkable paper in itself. Its significance is only derived from the serendipity of the present study and how that paper at that time relates to contemporaneous developments under scrutiny at that moment. It was written five years before the first 'moment' under review in the previous chapters, but as such, it provides a frame through which to access some of the 'spirit' of the curriculum development movement from which the later initiatives evolved.

The paper proposes four domains of policy for qualitative change in the education system: control of schools, curriculum content, alternative education, and education and 'outside' agencies. Under the first of these headings, the paper calls for 'public

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[18] A copy of the paper (Granville 1980) is included in Appendix 2

accountability for public funds' (Granville, 1980, p. 37), the ending of private, selective schooling and the establishment of regional educational authorities with democratic control of all schools. This was an overtly political position (and the main reason why the author was anxious to stress that the views expressed were strictly his own) and a minority one at the time, advocated solely by the Labour Party. Interestingly, some fifteen years later in 1995, the Education White Paper, published by the first Labour Party Minister for Education, proclaimed that the state would establish Regional Education Boards for such a purpose; in the event, political changes ensured that this policy was never enacted.

Specifically in terms of curriculum, the paper notes the irrelevance for many learners of current exam-driven school programmes: 'for many students, the years at school constitute an obstacle course that must be endured before real life begins' (p. 38). Instead, 'teachers must be given the freedom to introduce into the classroom topics which are not presently catered for in the national syllabi of the Department of Education … Alternative modes of examination – continuous assessment, project work, self-evaluation – could revolutionise school as we know it' (p. 38).

In respect of alternative education, the paper recalls the work of Freire, Illich and Reimer in almost nostalgic terms. It notes that for many young people, school itself was the problem and it advocates community-based alternatives, or 'free' schools, as a means of reaching those who left school early and were most vulnerable.

Finally, the paper calls for extended partnerships in education: however, it notes that 'unless the curriculum is flexible enough, such interaction is impossible' (p. 39). Extended relationships should be developed between schools and employers, and especially between schools and communities, with the particular role of parents highlighted. 'There is a strong case to be made for the appointment in every school of a Community Worker whose sole function would be to liaise with parents and to devise schemes to further their involvement with schools' (p. 40). In the event, by the late 1990s

a state sponsored scheme of Home/School/Community Liaison officers had been established in designated schools around the country.

The paper is a naively-presented personal statement of position, with three clear influences. Firstly, the myth of the youth culture is the basis for the piece. This reflects my own age and orientations at the time, as well as the perceived inclinations of a youth audience for an NYCI publication. References to 'the enthusiasm and excitement which permeated the sometimes anarchic and directionless quest for change in the late sixties and early seventies' (p. 36) and to music – 'maybe our ideas like our music need a return to the roots' (p. 40) – imbue the piece. Secondly, the political orthodoxy of left wing socialism is the point of reference for policy change, reflecting my engaged activity as an activist within the Labour Party. Thirdly, the curriculum commentary, slight and superficial as it is, reflects the core principles of the CDU and its operating culture as a dissident activity in relation to the dominant national school examination programmes.

Within the paper some dominant discourses are apparent, notably those of change and flexibility. In the opening two paragraphs of 270 words, the word 'change' appears seven times, with other references to 'choice', 'challenge' and calls for 'restructuring' to 'transform' society all reinforcing this rhetoric. However, the recurring reference to 'revolutionising' schools and fostering 'alternatives' characterise the essentially student-radical rhetoric of the piece, as distinct from formal curriculum discourse.

The professional work of the CDU was carried out in a more disciplined and grounded manner than the flighty rhetoric of this piece. In particular, the political partisanship of the piece was never the implicit or explicit position of the CDU. The curriculum development movement for the most part was teacher-driven, with the collaborative participation of networks of schools, largely drawn from the state vocational school sector in Dublin, associated with the CDU, and from a mixed selection of private secondary and state vocational/community schools associated with the CDC in Shannon. The IACD, formed to promote curriculum development at a professional level, contained a stronger academic presence, but even then, it was still a school rather than a university

dominated grouping. From those sources emanated the lobbying that would ultimately result in the establishment of the CEB in 1984.

I remained in the CDU first as leader of the Early School Leavers Project (1979-82) and subsequently of a successor project, the Dublin Inner City Education project (1982-85), also funded through the EU Transition network. Within these projects, four initiatives stand out (Ireland, 1984; Stokes, 1988):

- The Junior Cycle School Certificate Course: an alternative curriculum framework within which schools could tailor courses designed to meet the needs of identified potential early leavers. A network of schools was co-ordinated by the CDU, with certification provided by CDVEC. More than a decade later, this programme was accommodated within the national programme as the Junior Certificate Schools Programme;

- Education for Youth in Employment (EYE): a programme developed with employers to facilitate young workers (initially, young women) who had left school without qualifications to enter employment but who wished to reconnect with education. Some of the thinking inherent in this initiative later became manifest in the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) that facilitates adults in returning to education;

- Work Exploration: the projects operated a Work Exploration centre in Dublin to which schools could bring classes for intensive one-week full-time engagement in work simulation exercises, with associated vocational preparation. Elements of this programme informed later national developments in programmes such as the LCA and LCVP;

- Out-of-school alternatives: a centre was opened in School Street in the south inner city of Dublin, where early school-leavers were recruited to participate in educational programmes of an innovative nature. This experience was to be an influential factor in shaping the national Youthreach programme established in 1988.

Events in the wider world of Irish politics and education were moving apace, including a concerted lobbying of political parties for curriculum change, and, after a period of some political instability, a change of government in 1982 that resulted in a new government coalition of the Fine Gael and Labour parties (1982-87). Both new government parties were committed to the establishment of an independent curriculum and examinations body and the Interim CEB set up in 1984 by the Minister for Education Gemma Hussey, was the result of that commitment.

I applied for and was appointed as the first Assistant Chief Executive of the new body when the post was advertised in 1984. The newly appointed Chief Executive was Albert Ó Ceallaigh, a senior inspector in the Department of Education, who had been acting chief executive pending the new appointments. The new executive team was a strange combination in itself, personifying the two cultures out of which the new entity had been created – the established system of schooling, examinations and certification and the peripheral movement of alternative development and reform.

While only two full-time executive appointments were made, the work of the CEB was driven both by a very active and engaged board membership and by an extended professional staff comprising education officers on short-term, part-time secondment to the CEB. This group was responsible for the development and publication of an extensive body of curriculum policy documents (some of which have already been noted in the earlier chapters).

Blood on the Tracks

In 1996, some twenty five years after the foundation of the CDU, I was approached by its Director, Anton Trant who was considering some form of publication to mark this anniversary. With this in mind he requested a number of former staff members of the CDU each to write a reflection on their time spent there. The project was never brought to publication but I recall at the time that I welcomed the opportunity to reflect and to write in a light and informal style. In the event, the CDU 25th anniversary was marked by a

series of seminars shared with the Shannon CDC. The lead papers presented at those four seminars were subsequently published (Trant et al, 1998).

My unpublished paper[19] was written soon after the second moment of scrutiny described in Chapter Four above. It lay forgotten until it was uncovered in the course of the current research activity. It was written at a time when I was still Assistant Chief Executive of the NCCA, some eleven years after I had departed the CDU to take up this position with the newly established Curriculum and Examinations Board. The NCCA had by this time established itself as significant player in education policy making. The White Paper (1995) had been published, the new expanded senior cycle suite of programmes incorporating the Transition Year, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme and the Leaving Certificate Applied along with the established Leaving Certificate programme had been launched nationally. In terms of national achievement, the NCCA could be fairly described as a successful agency. Earlier battles with the Department of Education had been replaced by relatively peaceful co-existence. I was restless in my position, however. Within a year, I would depart the NCCA. It was in this context that the reflective nature of the paper was timely for me.

Like the earlier paper, the title is a musical reference – Bob Dylan's album *Blood on the Tracks*. The paper makes explicit the links I saw between my earlier work in the CDU and my then current work in national curriculum design. A paper I had published the previous year had attempted to track this relationship for the public record (Granville 1995). The essential point is reiterated in the following extract from this more personal paper:

> The new programme for the Leaving Certificate Applied … was firmly shaped by the experience and practice of the curriculum projects of the seventies and eighties. And as I do a mental audit of the various developments with which I am currently involved, at this period of extensive educational reform, I realise that there is really very little new under the sun; most new ideas are not new at all - it's just that their time may have come at last (Granville, 1996, p. 2).

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[19] A copy of the paper *Blood on the Tracks – Curriculum Development as a Subversive Activity*, (Granville, 1996) is included in Appendix 3

The structure of the paper is almost palimpsestic in its own right, although not consciously so. The construct of using the 'books on my shelf' as lenses through which to look, facilitates this self-referencing. There is a definite sense of the palimpsest about this passage:

> About once a year, I cull from the ever growing collection of books and reports those which I think have served their time and purpose. As I look at the ones which remain, a pattern emerges. I can pick out the ones which moved in here with me, the ones which for one reason or another have a continuing significance (p. 2).

Three sets of books are considered. The first consisted mainly of old Penguin education paperback editions of radical educationists, the second was a set of CDU project reports and the third was a strange collection of canal journals, each set being a form of sedimented history, each with its own distinctive curriculum script, a palimpsest that has been over-written with the passage of time.

The first set of books, including Illich, Reimer and Freire, provides an immediate link to and continuity from the earlier (1980) paper. If the rhetoric of the radical deschoolers and the critical educators was rarely heard in the late seventies and early eighties, it was barely remembered in the mid-nineties. However, the paper claims the theme of 'subversion' as a justification of the process of national curriculum definition. The statement that 'the first draft of the 1995 White Paper was written by the curriculum projects of that era' (p. 3) is an exaggerated and extravagant claim. Nevertheless, the curriculum chapters of the White Paper can indeed be linked to many of those initiatives: the formalisation of such programmes as the Leaving Certificate Applied and the Junior Certificate Schools Programme are two specific examples. It is ironic that Coolahan and Hyland, in their radio review of Trant's book, both made repeated reference to this line of connection, asserting that Trant should take credit for such national impact. Trant's reticence in respect of such claims betokens another position, that the essence of such innovations is lost at the point of apparent victory. When innovation is formalised as a system, it loses its essential value.

One key issue noted is the dissemination and take-up of innovation. The significance of the European dimension is highlighted in the reference to a meeting

> … at which a Department of Education official quoted as a powerful authority an EC document on assessment. The passage quoted had in fact been written by me as part of one our own reports; it had subsequently been incorporated verbatim in one of the European publications. The different status and authority achieved by the same idea expressed in the same words in two different documents was a telling lesson in the processes of dissemination and power (p. 6).

Ideas which were disregarded by the central authorities because they were seen as coming from vaguely unreliable sources (like the CDU) were treated with the greatest of respect when they came from a perceived higher authority like the European commission. The moral authority and influence exerted by those European projects in the early 1980s should not be under-estimated (O'Connor 1997, Gleeson 2000).

This paper, because it is less formal than conventional curriculum writing, does not engage explicitly in the conventional discourses that were already established in such writing. There is a sense of accomplishment underpinning the paper, however, a tone and register that seem to convey a moment of arrival. In artistic terms, there is a sense of realisation, of completion and of resolution in the completion of a project. Within the setting of a crit, such a presentation would be discerned more as exemplifying complacency and self-satisfaction more than completion or resolution.

Conclusion

The first paper, *How many Bricks in the Wall?* set out the naïve and simplistic views of a young and inexperienced curriculum developer. It reveals a simplistic sense of the ambition of curriculum reform in the 1970s. Insofar as it dealt with substantive curriculum issues, however, it espoused the still burgeoning principles of the CDU in respect of teacher autonomy, alternative modes of assessment and flexibility of provision.

The second paper, *Blood on the Tracks,* is a form of apologia, a somewhat guilty rationalisation of what the same person was doing in the NCCA in terms of its consistency with that earlier idealism and with the pioneering work of the CDU. It is an

attempt to justify the transfer of curriculum reform from the margins to the centre, by casting the author as 'an uneasy civil servant … a subversive sleeper at the heart of the bourgeois state' (p. 2/3). It claims that significant change had been achieved in the national curriculum framework, providing for increased flexibility and allowing for increased professional autonomy for schools and teachers. It is written from the perspective of victory: there is a tone of achievement in the paper that wishes to acknowledge, almost patronisingly, the pioneering work of the earlier generation of developers, lest it be forgotten in the mists of victory.

The essential message in the paper was captured in the final sentences:

> a curriculum as a statement of learning objectives, of knowledge content and of skills, cannot inspire wonder. The triumph of the CDU experience was that the curriculum was seen as the vehicle for liberation of teachers' creativity (p. 8/9).

But if that is the case, then a body such as NCCA is at best a facilitatory mechanism, providing a frame wherein schools, teachers and developmental agencies like the CDU can act. The real fear implicit in the piece, one that may indeed have been borne out in reality, was that national curriculum reform only amounted to various 'statements of learning objectives, of knowledge content and of skills', a far cry from the 'liberation of teachers' creativity'. Indeed, rather than achieving even the modest goal of facilitating creativity, such frames as are provided by central agencies like the NCCA may be disempowering and alienating.

Both papers show palimpsestic traces of a vision that had been obscured in the curriculum discourses of the 1980s and 90s. The inherent conflict between the ideals of the 1970s curriculum development movement and the realities of the new national curriculum processes was highlighted for me with the introduction of the Junior Certificate programme in 1989. This new unified programme was being introduced to replace the old Intermediate and Day Vocational or 'Group' certificate programmes. The rhetoric and design of the new programme – citing such concepts as breadth and balance, relevance and activity-based learning (NCCA, 1989) – owed much to the experience of the curriculum development movement of the previous decades. However, at public meetings around the country, introducing the programme to teachers and parents, I was

struck by the internal contradictions in my own presentation of the new programme. On the one hand, I was proclaiming a bright new dawn, a new programme that would transform teaching and learning in our schools. On the other hand, I was reassuring teachers that there was nothing to fear in the new programme, that their accumulated prior experience and practice would be sufficient: an example of reform without change.

In retrospect, unsurprisingly, it was the second implicit message that was the more accurate. The next chapter provides an overview of the process of curriculum reform that serves to demonstrate this and to explain why it has been so.

CHAPTER 7

Policy Review:

The Evolution of Curriculum Discourse (1980-2005)

Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the evolution of curriculum discourse in Ireland over the past twenty-five years or more, as captured in the foregoing chapters. Three broad claims are proposed here:

- The first claim is that the curriculum discourse that has evolved over that period has been a sequence of shifts from the periphery to the centre. The curriculum discourse has been generated by forces at the margins of the education system and this has shaped the creation of policy, initially in the absence of a coherent or rational curriculum policy beyond an uncritical implementation of the traditional programmes and structures. As each of these shifts occurred, a repositioning of the centre and periphery also occurred.

- The second claim is that at critical moments, the discourse that has been generated at the margins has been adopted at the centre, through a form of co-option or colonisation. This has had the effect of establishing the rhetoric of curriculum reform as the dominant discourse of policy but this rhetoric has not been realised in policy implementation: indeed, it has operated effectively as a conservative safety-valve, allowing the apparent triumph of radical policy to facilitate the entrenchment of conservative practices in education.

- The third claim is that, while the policy orientation of the centre has evolved in a non-ideological manner, it nevertheless has facilitated the same range of neo-liberal orthodoxies that have been identified in the international literature. This has been due to a combination of processes: rhetorical elisions – where certain policy positions advocated for one reason have been adopted and adapted for another purpose entirely; and serendipitous opportunism – where projects and programmes that have been ignored by the centre for long periods of time are suddenly embraced in a moment of policy innovation designed to respond to external pressures.

The narrative being expressed here relates to three critical moments of curriculum policy – the initial statements of the CEB in the 1980s, the landmark policy changes of the mid-90s and the long-term policy proposals of 2005. The relative positioning of the centre and the periphery at these moments can be contested. It is suggested here that in 'moment one' (mid 80s), there was an extensive but loosely-coupled extended periphery, clustered around a few important nodes, notably the Curriculum Development Unit in Dublin, the Curriculum Development Centre in Shannon and the Irish Association of Curriculum Development (IACD). At the same time there was a strongly centralised Department of Education that had exclusive control of national curriculum matters, and no inclination to shed any of that power. The establishment of the CEB constituted a bridgehead within the central state apparatus around which the forces on the periphery could establish and develop new policies at national level.

At 'moment two' (mid 90s), the ideas formalised and systematised by the CEB/NCCA were adopted as the norms of policy. The hitherto peripheral activities of curriculum agencies (CDU Dublin and CDC Shannon) were co-opted into a national project of curriculum development, and connected to the extended ambit of a national network of Education Centres: an extensive set of Support Services located in Education Centres and the CDU was established to help in the implementation of curriculum and syllabus change driven by the central authorities, DES and NCCA (Granville, 2005). This was a significant reversal of roles, a form of colonisation whereby what had been a subversive and counter-current activity now became a mandated service in support of the national system.

At 'moment three', the voice of the periphery is stilled, almost unheard. Instead there appears to be a contested process of argumentation between two central agencies of state, the NCCA and the DES. The debate is reminiscent of historical disputations between the Departments of Education and Labour in the eighties, where territoriality and responsibilities are contested: an unequal battle in this case, as the Minister for Education

retains ultimate power over the NCCA and any of their proposals are ultimately and always dependent on Ministerial approval. In terms of curriculum discourse, however, what is of interest is the avowal of the NCCA to locate its proposals for change in the domain of school empowerment, with an emphasis on the need to support changes in school cultures. Ironically, there is no voice from those interests, at the level of local school culture, discernable in the discourse.

The Evolution of Discourse

The two decades spanning the close of the 20th and the start of the 21st century saw a decisive shift in the curriculum agenda of post-primary schools. At the start of the period under review, curriculum matters were largely an uncontroversial and uncontested domain, insofar as national policy making was concerned. The official literature (i.e. formal publications from the Department of Education) was very limited, as was the academic literature in the field of education studies generally and curriculum studies in particular. Curriculum matters were for the most part, an uncontested field.

In a paper presented to an international seminar in 1976, Crooks and Trant outlined the context and mission of the CDU and in doing so articulated the essential principles and operational strategy of an innovative generation of curriculum developers. They described some of the challenges faced by the CDU as it tried to introduce change in a highly centralised, denominational education system

> There was no ethos of innovation in the system, and little understanding of the slowness or the complexity involved in innovation. Because of this lack of ethos, there was a tendency to look for immediate right answers instead of the formulation of the right questions. The centralised nature of the whole system also tended to influence educators to look for a new product – a new orthodoxy to be weighed against the old – rather than to see the innovation in terms of creating a new process, a new way of approaching the problems …

> The old programme was content-based, with an emphasis on summarisation of knowledge. The new programme was content-based with an emphasis on learning how to learn …

> The Curriculum Development Unit has demonstrated the potential for innovation through a consortium of co-operating schools, and through a belief in the ability

of teachers to diagnose and solve problems; whatever the future is, these two aspects of the work should remain (Crooks and Trant, 1976, pp 3, 5 and 8).

Mulcahy noted the work of the CDU, the CDC in Shannon and other local projects but wrote that 'the impact of such measures on the day-to-day conduct of post-primary education in Ireland has been very slight' (1981, p. 138). With the establishment of the Interim CEB in 1984, curriculum policy became a matter of more overt public and professional attention. The CEB series of publications on curriculum and assessment policy generated both a substantial body of public policy discourse in itself and a pattern of publication and public engagement in curriculum policy that has lasted and grown for the past quarter century.

The CEB, and its successor body the NCCA, can be seen as constituting a bridge between periphery and centre over the period up to the mid-1990s at least. From the perspective of the Department of Education, the CEB/NCCA was seen as a peripheral agent but increasingly, it became recognised as a central agency, initially within the education system itself (schools, teachers, parent bodies and the media) and ultimately, the Department of Education. A key moment in this transition from periphery to centre was a political decision. The new Minister for Education, Mary O'Rourke, established the NCCA as an advisory body in 1987: she simultaneously announced the introduction of a new national programme to be called the Junior Certificate. Ironically, given that her party Fianna Fáil did not support the establishment of an independent curriculum body, this programme was to be championed by the NCCA and in effect this became a landmark victory for the new body in defiance of the Department.

By the mid-1990s, despite its still not being a statutory body, the NCCA had established itself as a *de facto* central agency. The Education Act (Ireland, 1998) established the NCCA as a statutory body. The trajectory from periphery to centre, therefore, can be seen as a gradual process of advance, from the early days of the CEB to the final achievement of recognition in legislation at the turn of the new century. That trajectory might equally be described as the gradual erosion of vision and mission, so that some of those ideals from which the CEB had sprung initially, were lost at each point of incremental victory.

Continuity and change in senior cycle policy

Despite the flurry of activity in the mid-1990s, curriculum change has been limited. In looking back over the evolution of senior cycle curriculum policy over the past few decades, one is struck by the prevalence of continuity rather than change in terms of the issues raised. One might also comment on the resistance of the system to incorporate many of the proposals for change, despite their recurrent statement. Indeed their recurrent statement may be testament to the strength of that resistance. The table below attempts to summarise some of the key moments and issues as set out in successive CEB/NCCA documents dealing with senior cycle:

Year	Specific proposals	Big issues
1986	• Umbrella certificate • Units of study • Levels of course provision	Relationship between Academic and Vocational Education
1993	• Umbrella certificate • Units of study • Levels of course provision	Expanded provision for economic development
2005	• Umbrella certificate • Units of study • Levels of course provision	School culture

Table 2: Themes of Senior Cycle Reform 1986-2005

It is remarkable how the same proposals of common ('umbrella') certification, units of study (or modularisation) and levels of certification recur, almost as though newly invented with no cross-reference to their earlier iteration. The issue of 'policy amnesia' has been referred to in the literature in respect of the waves of innovation that are mandated with successive political regimes. Elmore (1996, p. 499) points out that education policy is additive by nature, layered in its evolution and filtered over time and contexts. Despite this, he identifies three common 'conceits' of policy makers: (a) that the newest set of reform policies automatically takes precedence over all previous policies under which the system has operated; (b) that reform policies emanate from a single level of the education system and embody a single message about what schools should do

differently; and (c) that reform policies should operate in more or less the same way in whatever settings they are implemented. These three 'conceits' of reform apply accurately to the Irish experience of education reform. It would appear that amnesia is a feature of education decision-making in Ireland as much as anywhere.

It is also noteworthy how little progress towards implementation has occurred in respect of any of these recurring issues. In fact, the only significant policy change that occurred was in the mid-1990s when a number of forces and currents came together. It is worth investigating the nature of those forces and currents and why they produced change at that time; and the implicit corollary, why change did not occur at other times.

Economic crisis and curriculum serendipity
A paper presented by Gleeson and the present author at the Educational Studies Association of Ireland in 1996 addressed the meaning of curriculum planning at national level in the late twentieth century. Two premises underpinned that paper:

- That curriculum development is a valuable activity in its own right, in its central concerns with the professional empowerment of the teacher, its emphasis on professional development and its responsiveness to the learning needs of students;
- That beyond this, there is a strong and symbiotic relationship between curriculum development, educational planning – in the sense of strategic, financial and systems management – and national economic and social policy (Gleeson and Granville 1996, p. 113).

These two premises contain an internal tension between the empowerment process of curriculum development and its more instrumental role in serving society. The experience of the 1990s, the second 'moment' of study in this thesis, illustrates which of these two features of curriculum development has been the more effective in driving change.

Three change factors
Three processes of change were brought to bear on the education system in the early to mid-1990s. The first arose from the dire economic situation of the state in the late 1980s. A number of influential reports both from within the education community and from outside, while acknowledging the established strengths of the Irish education system,

were critical of curriculum inadequacies in vocational education, in inclusion and equality provision and in orientation to the needs of a globalised economy. The response of the NCCA (1993) was to propose a curriculum solution through an expanded Leaving Certificate, rather than the creation of an entirely new alternative stream. This was the approach subsequently adopted in the Education White Paper (1995).

The second change factor that emerged in the 1990s was in the policy environment of education. A series of policy research papers emanating from the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) and the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) contributed to the formation of a new 'partnership' model of economic and social planning (Hardiman, 2000). A new relationship with the EU in respect of the education system was facilitated through the introduction of a series of national development plans – the Programme for National Recovery (1987), the Programme for Economic and Social progress (1990) the Programme for Competitiveness and Work (1993), and Partnership 2000 (1996). This allowed a very significant inflow of financial support from the EU through various initiatives under the 'training of trainers' banner, aimed at supporting schools and teachers engaged in innovative programmes aligned with the national development plans (Gleeson and Granville, 1996). For the first time in Irish education, financial resources of a very significant order were available to support change. Ironically, this positive resource environment occurred in the context of – indeed, as a direct response to – the severe economic crisis in which the country was mired.

The confluence of these two streams of influence required a third element to make change a reality. That third change factor was the availability of a specific programme structure and content that would be seen to meet the challenge of the external critics and provide the focus for the new funding. The adoption of the NCCA 1993 proposals for senior cycle reform appeared like a logical solution to an identified problem. From another perspective, however, that logic of cause-and-effect was not so clear. Essentially the NCCA proposals, while radical, were not new. As noted earlier (Chapter Four), they had been advocated by CEB nearly ten years previously and in their essence, they were

versions of initiatives that had been piloted by curriculum development projects from the 1970s but had been persistently ignored by the Department of Education.

The garbage-can theory

The process of adoption of the current Irish senior cycle curriculum was not the classic sequence of research, development and dissemination. Neither can it be seen as the application of any specific theoretical model.

Instead, it conforms somewhat to the 'garbage-can theory' of Cohen, March, and Olsen (1972). According to this theory, an organization will frequently find solutions not through logical analysis of and response to identified problems but through reaching for ideas that have already been proposed for other purposes and have hitherto been either ignored or rejected. Four determinants of organisational outcomes – problems, solutions, participants, and choices – can be seen as independent variables which an organisation or a system throws into a metaphorical garbage can. Most 'solutions' rest untouched and forgotten in the can. Occasionally, however, a problem arises for which a solution, which may have been developed for entirely different purposes, is found in the can:

> The theoretical breakthrough of the Garbage Can Model is that it disconnects problems, solutions and decision makers from each other, unlike traditional decision theory. Specific decisions do not follow an orderly process from problem to solution, but are outcomes of several relatively independent streams of events within the organization (Daft, 1982, p. 139).

This almost anarchic organisation theory seems to have resonance in the pragmatic culture of Irish policy making generally and of the educational policy process in particular. In a very real sense, the adoption of these proposals for change in the mid-1990s was an example of the 'garbage-can' model of innovation described by Cohen, March and Olsen. Institutional inertia rather than malign ideology will block the implementation of new ideas: intellectual advocacy and 'brute sanity' alone will not achieve reform. Only at moments of disjuncture, when external forces impinge on the dominant culture, does the need for change become urgent. At these moments, rather than inventing new solutions, leaders tend to search for available strategies that might lie in the corporate 'garbage cans'. Such ideas as are found there may then be dusted down and

presented as a rational response to the external pressures, although the original purposes of the ideas might have been quite different.

In a further gloss on the garbage can theory, Weick suggests that perhaps not all four of the decision-making determinants are equal: instead, 'choice may be the occasion when the other three [problems, solutions, people] become organised' (2001, p. 14). From that perspective, the curriculum initiatives of the mid-90s can be said to have organised the problems identified by Culliton, OECD and others into solutions that could be expressed as direct responses to those problems, in a way with which participants (policymakers, practitioners including teachers, school managers, parents and other 'partners') could each feel at ease and indeed of which they could take ownership. This despite the fact that the alleged 'choice' had pre-existed the perceived problem, was a solution for other issues and concerns, and was driven by people with a different purpose and agenda.

The curriculum changes of the mid-1990s can be seen as an example of such 'garbage-can' thinking. Certainly, the establishment of the Junior Certificate Schools Programme is a case in point. This programme had been developed by the Early School Leavers Project (1979-1982), located in the CDU nearly twenty years previously (see Chapter Six). The Junior Cycle School Certificate Programme as it was formerly known was maintained in the CDU with a small network of schools through the 1980s and 1990s despite no support funding from the Department of Education. In the context of national concerns about retention, equality of access and progression routes, the NCCA (1993) formally proposed its incorporation within the ambit of the Junior Certificate programme. A Departmental working group was established to review that proposal and the White Paper formally adopted it as policy.

In similar manner, the NCCA proposals for senior cycle reform, which were hugely influenced by the experience of the CDC Shannon and CDU Dublin experiences in curriculum development, were very quickly adopted as national policy, despite their having been studiously ignored for more than twenty years. These three factors – economic crisis, with an attendant critique of what the education system had been failing

to contribute, EU funding for educational change and the availability of 'ready-made' curriculum solutions – provided a neat package of complementary forces for change.

Curriculum theory and critique

The upper-secondary or senior cycle has historically constituted the domain where education, training and work interests align, inter-relate and overlap. Contemporary critiques of schooling from Bowles and Gintis (1975) and Willis (1977) to Lave and Wenger (1991), Coffield (2000), Engestrom (2001) and Young (2003, 2008) have tracked values and norms in education policies and systems, according to models of engagement, politics and practice. A recent commentator (Saunders, 2006) has provided an overview of these international discourses, suggesting a typology of narratives that have shaped our understanding of contemporary education policies.

Saunders has identified six different international narratives that have attempted to capture the educational, social and political priorities that shape policy in this domain. While these narratives neither necessarily replace nor exclude each other, they are categorised as follows: functionalist, Marxist, liberal, progressive/emancipatory, social practice, boundary crossing. The Irish experience incorporates significant strands of all of these narratives, with no single one dominating the policy programme. The liberal tradition has underpinned the classical, humanist conception of secondary schooling, while the functionalist narrative is highly apparent in the human-capital and instrumental orientation of analyses such as the OECD (1991) and the HEA (2002). Elements of both Marxist and emancipatory approaches can be discerned in the early work of the CDU, while social practice and boundary crossing influences are visible in recent NCCA (2004/5) policy papers.

Yet, such a typology would seem to be an imposed formulation on a system and a process that has been less consciously ideological and perhaps more pragmatic and opportunist than other jurisdictions. While no single narrative in Saunders's typology captures the Irish experience, each is discernible, but unselfconsciously so. Indeed, as various commentators (Gleeson, 2000; Williams and McNamara 2003; O'Sullivan, 1989, 1994,

2005) have suggested, an easy consensus in curriculum rhetoric has been apparent among policy makers, education professionals and academics. Thus, for example, while all policy initiatives include rhetorical commitment to address inequality, O'Sullivan (2005) suggests that there is a reluctance to take decisive political action to redistribute wealth[20]. Williams and McNamara suggest that other issues such as the changing nature of Irish identity have been avoided:

> It is hard to avoid the conclusion that scholars fight shy of contentious topics that give rise to genuine disagreement. The notion of *critique* is tied almost exclusively to standard denunciations of the socio-economic and educational system (Williams and McNamara, 2003, p. 377).

That easy consensus in relation to critique extends also to the role and understanding of knowledge in contemporary education.

Knowledge in the knowledge society

At the start of the 21st century, the conventional wisdom of official policy is that the education system is central to the evolution of the knowledge society. Yet it has been noted (Moore and Young, 2001, p. 456) that 'knowledge is possibly the central category that is missing from debates about the knowledge society and its educational implications'. An understanding of curriculum is essential to make sense of and give meaning to the knowledge society. Curriculum design has moved from being dominated by specification of knowledge content to a broader perspective, typically embracing various elements of learning such as knowledge, skills, attitudes, concepts, understanding or experiences. Still, knowledge as such remains a central concept underpinning all formulations of curriculum.

'Knowledge' is the subject of much policy rhetoric but little analysis, in Ireland and internationally. Emergent policies and structures in various countries treat knowledge

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[20] The title of an earlier paper by O'Sullivan (1994) 'Hands up all in Favour of Inequality! Irish Educational Policy and Equity' captures this concept of easy consensus.

largely as an unproblematic concept. Foucault in his early and middle writings explicitly associated knowledge with power:

> We live in a social universe in which the formation, circulation, and utilization of knowledge presents a fundamental problem. If the accumulation of capital has been an essential feature of our society, the accumulation of knowledge has not been any less so. Now, the exercise, production, and accumulation of this knowledge cannot be dissociated from the mechanisms of power; complex relations exist which must be analysed (1991, p 165).

The 'knowledge society' (and its myriad cognate terms including knowledge economy, learning society, and so on) is espoused in Irish official documents with almost monotonous regularity. The most recent variations on this theme were the government strategy pronouncement of December 2008, entitled *Building Ireland's Smart Economy* (Ireland, 2008) and the National Competitiveness Council (NCC) *Statement on Education and Training* (NCC, 2009). Peters (2001, 2006) identifies a clear distinction between the separate and parallel discourses of the knowledge economy and the knowledge society, between the economics of knowledge and the sociology of knowledge. The dualism inherent in these distinctions is accommodated in the policy arena, he suggests, through a process of 'culturalisation of the economy', a process that presents these discourses as 'performative ideologies with constitutive effects at the level of public policy' (2006, p. 10).

Knowledge is seen within this culturalisation process both as a commodity for trading within a global economy and as a platform for achieving competitive advantage. This was cogently expressed in Bell's formulation that 'when knowledge becomes involved in some systematic form in the *applied transformation of resources*, then one can say that knowledge, not labour, is the source of value' (Bell, 1979, p. 169 cited in Guile 2006, p. 358). Two forms of knowledge have been identified: explicit knowledge, which is easily transferable and as such cannot produce a competitive advantage, and tacit knowledge, which is non-codifiable, difficult to transfer and often context-specific (Gibbons et al, 1994). Explicit knowledge can be understood as *knowing about* facts and theories and tacit knowledge as *knowing how* to apply them. Tacit knowledge is rare, valuable and

inimitable, thus driving competitive advantage and performance (Grant, 1996; Baden-Fuller and Grant, 2004) with the potential to create wealth. However, these nuanced distinctions in forms of knowledge are not reflected in contemporary education/economy policy initiatives (Guile, 2006).

Knowledge use and innovation are seen as determining factors in enabling national economies to compete and the linkage between education and innovation-systems is crucial to this. In addressing the role and meaning of knowledge in contemporary society, Lyotard (1984, p. 5) noted with prescience that '(k)nowledge in the form of an informational commodity indispensable to productive power is already, and will continue to be, a major – perhaps the major – stake in the worldwide competition for power'.

There is a consensus in economic theory firstly, that education is important for successful research activities (by producing scientists and engineers), which in turn is important for productivity growth; and secondly that education creates human capital, which directly affects knowledge accumulation and thus productivity growth (Peters, 2001, p. 9). This line of thought is manifestly prevalent in numerous Irish policy pronouncements relating to education and economy, as outlined in the following section.

Performativity and policy

Lyotard some three decades ago, stated that the true goal of the system of knowledge is 'the optimisation of the global relationship between input and output, in other words, performativity' (1984, p. 11). In the context of education policy, performativity is manifested through the specification of system targets, performance indicators and competitive standards, and consequently through managerial control, unitary teaching, monologic learning and risk avoidance (Owen, 2007). Ball (1998, pp. 190-191) argues that this performativity operates in at least three ways:

> First, it works as a disciplinary system of judgements, classifications and targets towards which schools and teachers must strive and against and through which they are evaluated ... Second, as part of the transformation of education and schooling and the expansion of the power of capital, performativity provides sign systems which 'represent' education in a self-referential and reified form for consumption ... Third, performativity also resides in the pragmatics of language ...

> For example, the utterances of educational management and the effective schools movement ... exemplify the instrumental rational orientation to institutional life.

This process of performativity resonates with Bourdieu's (1990) concept of 'codification', an operation of symbolic ordering which removes ambiguity, normalises activity and 'goes hand in glove with discipline' (Thomson 2005, p. 743). Codification gives the appearance of scientific neutrality and ensures calculability and predictability over and above individual variations and temporal fluctuations.

Education policy can thus be uncritically subsumed into wider policy development for socio-economic and political purposes. This socio-economic domain has always been a legitimate focus for educational discourse, but increasingly it has become the dominant if not the sole forum. The concept of the learning society, with its inherent prioritisation of the individual learner, has become ever more closely aligned with that of the knowledge economy, through a gradual elision of distinctions. Guile (2003, p. 92) suggests that this process provides educational policy makers with the comforting illusion that the inherently difficult task of building constructive relationships between education and the economy can best be achieved by placing responsibility on the individual to make – indeed to embody – those linkages. The acquisition of credentials becomes the yardstick for defining and measuring the knowledge society. This 'credentialist agenda' sets as appropriate objectives for education policy, the acquisition of skills, the access to institutions and modes of learning and the accumulation of qualifications, as if this were 'sufficient evidence of the creation of a learning society' (Guile, p. 93). Qualifications frameworks have become perhaps the most explicit and overt manifestations of the knowledge society as a social construct (e.g. NQAI, 2002).

Along with the subsuming of education policy into wider socio-economic policy, there is a reverse process at work as well: the internalisation of performativities at the level of teaching and learning. Even at the level of primary education, Broadfoot and Pollard assert that the dominance of performative targets and measures has had the effect of silencing alternative views of the aims and processes of education. More worryingly, they suggest that

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when translated into practice, these policies mould individuals' views of themselves, both as learners and as people more generally in defining notions of success and failure and the reasons for it (2006, p. 765).

In terms of Irish education policy, the performative turn in policy is vividly demonstrated through an examination of some recent Irish policy documents (NCC 2009, Ireland 2008, EGFSN, 2007: ESG, 2004; HEA 2002), summarised as follows[21]:

'Upskilling':
- An additional 500,000 individuals in the workforce will need to progress by at least one level of educational attainment above their current highest level;
- This 'One Step Up' campaign would be facilitated by the National Framework of Qualifications.

Second Level:
- The Leaving Certificate retention rate should reach 90% by 2020;
- Ireland should aspire to have 94% percent of the Population aged 20 -24 with Upper Secondary Education;
- Curriculum should be expressed in terms of anticipated learning outcomes;
- A new work-study programme for those who do not complete their schooling should be developed and such a qualification should be equivalent to Leaving Certificate standard.

Third Level:
- The progression rate to third level should increase to 70% over the period to 2020;
- Ireland should be in the top decile of OECD in terms of proportion of graduates;
- The enterprise sector should have a more prominent role in HE governing bodies and these bodies should be leaner and more proactive;
- Funding for higher education institutions should be on a competitive basis;
- There should be a doubling in the rate of PhD graduates by 2020.

The performative nature of these targets is clear and comparable to those of any more overtly neo-liberal political jurisdiction. The extensive process of review and consultation in relation to the senior cycle (upper secondary) curriculum that was carried out by the NCCA should be viewed in this context. The policy advice that was offered to the Minister in 2004/5 outlined a comprehensive series of steps designed to consolidate much of the extensive curriculum reform that had been carried out since the early 1990s and to

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[21] Some of this section is summarised from an earlier (2007) paper submitted by the author as part of the EdD programme

develop some further policy initiatives. The new policy proposals featured a more diverse set of programmes of study with a wider portfolio of curriculum components, an extended set of assessment processes and a significant development of structural arrangements for course duration over a two or three year period.

The proposals also included a new template for course design including the specification of learning objectives for all subjects, short-courses and transition units, and the development of key or generic skills to be taught through all courses. Learning outcomes were described as 'clear, detailed statements of what it is expected each student will have achieved and will be able to do as a result of the learning associated with the unit' (NCCA, 2005, p. 72). Common key skills were identified 'as central to teaching and learning across the curriculum at senior cycle (p. 41). These would not be taught in isolation but as an integral part of learning for all students in all subjects, short courses or transition units.

According to the NCCA, the proposals involved

> … rebalancing the relationship within the curriculum between content and skills. They provide for improved access to a variety of assessment methods and for the introduction of a new inclusive certificate of senior cycle education. These developments are linked inextricably to a changing culture of schooling where learners will take responsibility for their learning choices, activities and achievements and where schools will facilitate a wider range of learning experiments, opportunities and environments (2005, p.5/6).

As we have seen, the response of the Minister for Education was not very positive. She preferred a more pragmatic and incremental approach to reform and in particular she rejected the proposed structural change relating to school culture, to learner autonomy and to differentiated programme construction. The result has been that the NCCA reform programme has continued on a much more restricted basis (NCCA, 2006).

Ironically, the curtailed nature of the senior cycle reform gives greater prominence to such curriculum design features as learning outcomes and key skills, no longer 'linked inextricably' to a learning environment of greater learner autonomy and changed school cultures. Instead, they are likely to become the sole criteria of performance by schools,

teachers and students, in a monitoring, research and evaluation system informed by emerging research findings, proofing of curriculum policy and practice with reference to important national and educational criteria and application of specific indicators, such as achievement, participation and progression rates (NCCA, 2005, p. 31).

This carries with it all the risks and few of the benefits associated with the 'outcomes-based education' (OBE) movement. Concern has frequently been expressed in relation to the effect of OBE approaches in general education settings. Elliot for example, cautions against the 'control ideology' that he sees as distinguishing much of the OBE agenda:

> Within the Outcomes Based Education framework 'evidence based teaching' can be characterised as a means of improving teaching as a form of technical control over the production of learning outcomes, thereby rendering them increasingly predictable (2001, 558).

The predictability of educational outcomes echoes the 'teacher proof' attempts of the US curriculum projects in the late 1950s and 60s – an aspiration that curriculum design and prescribed materials and methodologies can produce uniform and consistent results across times and contexts. This 'engineering' model of education research is based on certain assumptions about 'the nature of social practices like "education" and their relationship to desirable social outcomes' (Elliot, p. 560). These assumptions are embedded in OBE thinking:

1. That social practices are activities that need to be justified as effective and efficient means of producing desirable outputs.
2. That means and ends are contingently related. What constitutes an appropriate means for bringing about the ends-in-view needs to be determined on the basis of empirical evidence.
3. That the determination of means requires a clear and precise pre-specification of ends as tangible and measurable outputs or targets, which constitute the quality standards against which the performance of social practitioners is to be judged (Elliot, 2001, p. 560).

The application of a rigid model of learning outcomes can be inimical to good teaching and learning; as one commentator expressed it:

> What happens in the learning experience is an outcome of the original, creative, thinking-on-your-feet of the teacher – which often leads the class in directions far, far away from the anticipated learning outcomes of the curriculum writers (Schwartz, 2006, p. 45).

Similarly, the unpredictability of teaching and learning as a true practice is proclaimed by Mezirow, in advocating transformative learning. Within transformation theory, teaching and learning is consciously student-centred and exploratory; it cannot be constrained by the detailed specificity of prescribed 'outcomes':

> The focus of the educator is on facilitating a continuing process of critical inquiry wherever it leads the learner. There are no 'anticipated learning outcomes' in transformative learning (Mezirow, 1999).

While Mezirow was coming from an adult education perspective, that perspective on teaching and learning is reflected well in the NCCA Senior Cycle advice to the Minister for Education and Science (2005). That advice emphasises the relative autonomy of the learner and the individualised nature of learning and sense-making. Yet the NCCA plan also adheres to a very structured and systematic syllabus design template incorporating the specification of learning outcomes as its central mechanism. The response of the Minister, in effect, was to adopt the rigidities of form within the NCCA proposals but to reject the context of reculturation and growth.

The high stakes that the NCCA had played for, the all-or-nothing approach and the 'indivisibility' of proposals, had unravelled. The curtailed programme of reform brings with it all the threat but none of the promise of the greater vision. It is dominated by a discourse that owes more to the globalised, neo-liberal agenda than to the ideals of the curriculum development movement. The final part of this policy review chapter therefore will try to place the recent Irish experience, as described in this thesis so far, in the wider context of globalised policy discourse.

Globalisation and Education

The predominant global conception of education in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries is as human-capital development. This has resulted in the emergence of a common and coherent set of policy themes and processes – globalised policy discourses – through which policy makers, at national, international and transnational levels, seek to reshape education systems. This education policy field is situated between global pressures and local or vernacular education policy responses. These globalised policy

agendas and processes interact with traditions, ideologies, institutions and politics that have developed on national terrains, resulting in vernacular education policy outcomes (Ozga and Lingard, 2007, p. 69).

Policy borrowing is an international phenomenon characteristic of most economies in the contemporary world (Stiglitz, 2002). It is as apparent in education as in other domains of social or economic policy. It is rarely an overt and explicit activity: Ozga and Jones (2006) refer to 'travelling and embedded policy' rather than conscious acts of policy borrowing or transfer, as such. A feature of this process is that certain elements of policy discourse are de-contextualised and promoted by key agents who operate as a 'magistrature of influence': major transnational bodies like the OECD and the World Bank have been identified as such agents (Ozga and Lingard, 2007; Taylor and Henry, 2007). The importance of the OECD at crucial moments in the evolution of Irish education policy, including its reports in 1966, 1991 and 2004, is of interest in this context, in terms of their iconic significance as much as their promulgation of such priorities as 'the critical importance to the economy … (of) the primary products of the tertiary education – qualified workforce and research' (2004, p. 44).

The practice of policy borrowing is driven by various factors and pressures, but is usually triggered by a moment of crisis or a failure of strategy – political change, systemic collapse, internal dissatisfaction, negative external evaluation, new configurations and alliances, knowledge and skills innovations, the aftermath of extreme upheaval and economic change (Mukora, 2006, p. 55). Phillip and Ochs (2004) construct a four-stage model of policy borrowing, involving cross-national attraction, decision making, implementation and internalisation. This is not necessarily a sequential or linear process: these elements may overlap and occur simultaneously. Perhaps most significantly, the process of 'internalisation' is characterised by the vanishing of the origins of the borrowed ideas. Instead, such ideas become part of the 'habitus' within which educational discourse takes place, an uncontested, common-sense platform underpinning all education policy.

Five characteristic features of the international movement for education reform in recent years have been identified (Carter and O'Neill 1995, p. 9), and these resonate clearly with the rhetoric of education reform in Ireland:

1. improving national economies by tightening the connection between schooling, employment productivity and trade;
2. enhancing student outcomes in employment related skills and competencies;
3. attaining more direct control over curriculum content and assessment;
4. reducing the costs to government of education;
5. increasing community input to education by more direct involvement in school decision making and pressure of market choice.

Ball (2007) further identifies common ideas underpinning the reform rhetoric embedded in those categories: *neo-liberalism* or the ideology of the market; *new institutional economics*, involving devolution, mission specification and incentives; *performativity*, expressed in target-setting and performance indicators; *public choice theory*, exemplified in increased support for market forces in the domain of public services; and *new public managerialism*, as a paradigm for the management of the public service. He also notes that despite the importance of local variations in policy, the pervasive adoption of common education reform policies has first and second order effects in terms of their internalisation by participants (Foucault's 'technologies of the self'). Key features of neo-liberal orthodoxies are captured in Lyotard's term 'performativity', and amplified in the education context by writers such as Ball (2006), Broadfoot and Pollard (2006), Owen (2007) and Ozga and Lingard (2007). For the most part, these are mechanisms of administrative implementation, frequently presented in terms of empowerment. In practice, however, they emphasise accountability at the expense of professionalism, competition at the expense of collegiality. In their performative functions, they exercise a pervasive and internalised power within the daily life of schools and other institutions. As Ball puts it:

> They do not so much bear down upon but take shape within the practices of the institution itself and construct individuals and their social relations through direct interaction. This is, at least in some respects, a constructive rather than coercive power. It does not simply constrain and oppress; it articulates a mode of personal existence which is inscribed within the 'minute arts of self-scrutiny, self-evaluation, and self regulation', but often expressed in a language of 'empowerment' (1997, p. 261).

Likewise, Apple (2008, p. 43-40) stresses the dangers inherent in importing reforms out of context. With specific reference to the dominant globalised discourse of education, he cautions that the prevalence of concepts such as accountability, competition and choice can replace established values and marginalise previous roles, loyalties and subjectivities.

It is informative to track these characteristics against the series of educational reform measures in Ireland over the past few decades, especially since the mid-1990s. While each of these features appears in the reforms in Ireland, they have been fairly consistently accompanied by commitments to broader values in education other than economic utility or employability. Thus, the HEA (2002) stated:

> …we refute any view that there is a choice to be made between so-called 'utilitarian' and 'higher order' objectives for education and research… we need to strive for a holistic education and research system which provides us as individuals, and as a society, with the means to make our contributions in the economic, social and cultural domains of our society, but which also provide us with the means to achieve our personal goals for self realisation and fulfilment' (p. 37/8).

Yet, after the OECD reported on higher education policy in Ireland in 2004, a response from Irish academics noted the reference in the report to the importance of the humanities:

> However, the report obscures precisely this role by ignoring it: it has nothing whatever to say about it and no recommendations to make concerning it, thereby reinforcing the impression that the ultimate purpose of higher education is the economic welfare of the state (RIA, 2007, p. 8).

The features of international globalised education policy resonate strongly with the five core principles underpinning the government White Paper (1995, pp. 7-9): pluralism, equality, partnership, quality and accountability. These principles were expressed in general liberal and democratic terms but they contained within them – especially the latter three principles – many of the dominant features of the neo-liberal international discourse, including recurring treatment of evaluation, transparency, accountability and value for money. Similarly, the earlier Green Paper (1992) set out six aims for education policy, among which were three specifically performative by nature – devolving administration, quality assurance and accountability.

The specific effect of globalisation and policy borrowing on curriculum policy is less easy to distinguish immediately. In curriculum terms, they are manifested in discourses dominated by such concepts as learning outcomes, key skills and standard levels. Ozga and Lingard contend that local 'vernacular' policies can retain distinctive characteristics in the face of the globalised tide, and can often accommodate incrementally the positive implications of such globalisation.

The inertia and resistance to change of education systems has been widely commented upon (Sarazon 1990; Cuban, 1990; Fullan, 1993). Waks's (2006, p. 837) contention, however, is that globalisation can cause fundamental as distinct from incremental curriculum change. According to Waks, there are four constraints to fundamental change in education. The first constraint is that powerful, established elites, including the corporate and political establishment and traditional educators, tend to support entrenched practices, and are in turn sustained by them. For fundamental change to occur, this support must be withdrawn. Some of these elite groups would then combine with a critical mass of citizens to constitute a powerful constituency for change.

The second constraint is the process whereby schools 'buffer' against, adapt and assimilate into existing practices any external move for mandated change. In curriculum terms, the fault-lines that have been identified between the curriculum as designed or intended, as interpreted or mediated and as received or understood (Cuban 1990; Elmore, 1996) are examples of the buffering that occurs between the central policy makers and the peripheral school practitioners. In order for curriculum change to be effective, some destabilisation of internal school processes is necessary.

Thirdly, there is a wider social context that reinforces the established cultures and practices of school. Tight linkages exist between entrenched patterns of schooling, including examinations and qualification systems, and other institutions and groupings, including further and higher education, employers and training authorities, and the wider public consciousness of parents and citizens. For fundamental change to occur, these

linkages must be overcome. Finally, the fourth constraint lies in the fragmented and sometimes conflicting visions of change espoused by reformers. If this fragmentation is replaced by a coherent vision consistent with emerging popular models of rational action, change becomes possible.

Speaking from an American perspective, Waks concludes (p. 840) that these constraints are now being eroded by the process of globalisation, creating powerful external alliances for change, destabilising internal processes, weakening external props and facilitating the emergence of credible leaders with coherent visions. While this conclusion may be open to dispute, the constraints he identifies are certainly real and can be easily mapped onto the Irish curriculum experience.

At the first moment under review, (early 1980s) when the idea of curriculum reform was becoming established through the new CEB, Waks's four constraints can be seen to be in place. The political, corporate and educational elites, including teacher unions, school managerial bodies and the Department of Education, shared a broadly common belief in the structures and content of education. While the need for change was recognised, there was a broad consensus that such change was mainly for the provision of more of the same, with relatively minor incremental change in curriculum.

The capacity of school cultures to 'buffer' against change was particularly strongly demonstrated. The change in presentation of the CEB curriculum from the 'wheel' to the areas of experience model in itself was a concession to the subject-driven curriculum frame of schools. When the new Junior Certificate programme was introduced in 1989, it was presented in the language of reform and curriculum innovation, yet it became grafted on to existing structures and practices. The interface between the school system on the one hand and employers, higher education and civil society on the other has been predominantly expressed through the examination and certification system. As long as this remained identifiably unchanged, especially within the flagship Leaving Certificate, then incremental or minor changes elsewhere could be tolerated. The voices for change were singular and weak or fragmented and divided. Thus the radical curriculum

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innovators, placing a premium on teacher autonomy were not supported by the major institutional voices of teachers – i.e. the unions – let alone by other players in the field.

Similarly, at moment three (c. 2005), calls for radical change from NCCA were not supported with any degree of passion by the education partners. Significantly, the most potent and innovative feature of the NCCA 2004/5 proposals was to radically reinterpret the nature of school culture. The consultative process found support for this but no committed 'buy-in'. A silence, probably reflecting indifference rather than opposition, emanated from the political, corporate and other elites. The Minister, in responding to the package of proposals was able to cherry-pick such internal technical reforms as syllabus revision and short-course construction but block off any more ambitious plans for reculturation. The rationale for the Minister's refusal to adopt the proposals was crucially based on the need to preserve the status and esteem accruing to the Leaving Certificate, the high point of mediation between schools and employers, higher education and the rest of civil society.

By contrast, at moment two in the mid-1990s, the set of constraints was at its weakest point. Internal and external critics of the education system had built up a consensus for change. The dire state of the economy had produced a sense of crisis if not panic in the dominant elites, particularly those of the corporate and political worlds. For a brief moment, the fragmented visions of education reformers seemed to be aligned with the political and economic consensus for educational change. The result was a decisive intervention for significant curriculum change. The capacity of school culture to act as a buffer or brake on substantive change was reduced but not eliminated; the introduction of the Leaving Certificate Applied, for instance, a radical and innovative programme in the tradition of the curriculum projects of the 1970s and 80s, was tempered in schools depending on local practices and traditions (Gleeson et al, 2002). Yet the consensus to search for meaningful and swift solutions to the perceived problems bearing on the relationship between education and the economy was sufficient to break down such inertia as was evident at that time.

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Waks's identification of the constraints on educational change resonates with the Irish situation, and in particular, it bears fruit on the one moment of substantive change, when various forces combined to shift the rooted inertia of the system. The extent to which those changes themselves constituted an example of policy borrowing is more dubious however. As noted earlier, the adoption of change in the mid-1990s owed more to the 'garbage-can' model of innovation than to either overt policy-borrowing from the globalised education reform movement, or to considered, professional embracing of the rationale of the curriculum development movement.

Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the curriculum policy developments in Ireland over the past quarter century with regard both to locally generated issues and especially to globalised or transnational features of education reform. The overall pattern of evolution that has been discerned is more chaotic than coherent, a process of *ad hoc* colonisation of ideas and models, serendipitous opportunism and pragmatic invention. The language of curriculum development that had been generated through marginal pilot projects in the 1970s and 80s had become the dominant register of discourse. This was due chiefly to the work of the CEB in establishing the frame of curriculum discourse, with an emphasis on such features as breadth and balance, areas of experience and holistic education. However, while that language was adopted at a rhetorical level, in policy documents and in the general discourse associated with curriculum matters, it achieved very little apparent translation into curriculum practice. In particular, the 'gold standard' of Irish education, the established Leaving Certificate programme remained virtually untouched by events, despite repeated critiques.

The process of post-primary curriculum policy evolution in Ireland mirrors the generalised four-stage model of educational change proposed by Goodson (2004, p. 24)) spanning invention, promotion, legislation and mythologisation. In the period under review here, invention can be seen as the change formulation engaged in by the CEB and early NCCA (moment one). Promotion can be seen as the process of reform introduced in the mid-1990s (moment two). Legislation can be interpreted as policy establishment,

reflected in the rush of legislation in the late 1990s and early 2000s (moment three). Mythologisation is the enshrined sense of accomplished change. This thesis however suggests that that process of mythologisation is itself largely mythical, more apparent than real.

As the process of curriculum review has evolved, the formerly marginal voices of curriculum development have become mainstreamed; the NCCA has become an established player at the centre of policy making and the voices on the margins have been harder to hear. Significantly, certain motifs from the international experience have come into prominence in the evolved curriculum discourse. Notable amongst these are a decisive turn towards performative target-setting in education, the adoption of a curriculum model based on learning outcomes and the uncritical acceptance of the concept of the 'knowledge society' as the context for all education planning. While there is no evidence of a conscious ideological driver for education change, the net effect has been to present a curriculum discourse in Irish education that bears many of the features of the global neo-liberal agenda.

CHAPTER 8

Conclusions

Introduction

This thesis has examined the evolution of curriculum policy in Ireland over the past thirty years. Three significant moments have been identified in this period of evolution and these moments have been examined in terms of the official policy publications that defined them. Critical discourse analysis has been used as a lens for scrutiny of these texts. This has been complemented by the use of an arts-based lens, consisting of an auto-ethnographic narrative, informed by the structure of the visual arts pedagogic process, the crit.

Three claims are made in this study:

    a. that the curriculum discourse that has evolved over the period in question has been a sequence of shifts from the periphery to the centre.

    b. that at critical moments, the discourse that has been generated at the margins has been adopted at the centre, through a form of co-option or colonisation.

    c. that, while the policy orientation of the centre has evolved in a non-ideological manner, it nevertheless has facilitated the same range of neo-liberal orthodoxies that have been identified in the international literature.

In the light of these conclusions, this chapter summarises the deceptive trajectories of curriculum discourse over the past quarter-century and discusses the meaning of curriculum in contemporary education. The chapter concludes with some reflections on the significance of the research findings, on the research process itself and on curriculum policy for the future.

Discourse features

Certain themes recur, explicitly and implicitly, in the curriculum discourse that has grown through the past three decades. The discourses of change, of flexibility and of consultation have been identified at each of the three moments under scrutiny.

The discourse of change

The evolving discourse of 'change' is one of the most striking features of the sequential development of curriculum policy under examination in this thesis. The phenomenon of the CEB was essentially bound up with change, and it reflected the thinking and the challenges that were articulated by Crooks and Trant (1976, cited earlier) in terms of the absence of an 'ethos of innovation'. The creation of an environment for such an ethos was identified as one of its central challenges by the CEB in its first document, *Issue and Structures*. The meaning of change is itself a recurring issue of contention in the language of education reform (Fullan, 1991, 1993; Ruddock, 1991).

In terms of the three moments under scrutiny here, there is a decided retrenchment in the treatment of change as a concept. The early documents are replete with almost cavalier references to change and innovation (See Chapter Three above). A decidedly more cautious tone was sounded by the 1990s:

> The process of curriculum change is a delicate activity. The curriculum must be nurtured as a living organism … Too rapid or drastic an imposition of change can be destructive of the curriculum, as with any other living organism. The NCCA approach to curriculum reform, for pragmatic and principled reasons, is characterised by gradual, incremental growth, with controlled points of crucial change … (NCCA, 1993, p. 49).

Over the next decade, this cautious treatment of the concept and process of change was replaced by an overtly defensive one:

> Not changing, leaving things as they are, is not an option. It is a temptation. At a glance it may seem that senior cycle is 'not broken', and requires no 'fixing'… [there is a] need for a slow, steady and well-resourced path of change guided by a vision of reform that is characterised by informed planning and resourcing, careful monitoring and regular checks on system progress (NCCA, 2004, pp. 8, 9).

> The developments proposed for senior cycle education are designed to maintain the clear strengths of the existing senior cycle educational experience and to improve on them. They do not involve change for change's sake (NCCA 2005, p. 5).

This charge of 'change for change's sake' was clearly one that carried some weight, both in schools and in the DES. In a radio interview, the Minister had cautioned on the dangers of 'change for the sake of change' and had somewhat dismissively referred to the NCCA proposals as a 'Rolls-Royce' model that the state could not afford. The Minister in her response to the NCCA proposals in June 2005, queried implicitly the need for the scale of change envisaged, in terms of the costs involved and the capacity of the system to accommodate them: 'I note that the approach of the Council in designing these reforms has been to build on the existing strengths of the present senior cycle and I strongly approve of this' (Hanafin, 2005).

The CEO of the NCCA, in turn, came back to this question of change in her reply to the Minister:

> Your opening comments pointed to the scale of the changes and to their costs and logistical issues. The NCCA is cognisant of the implications of its proposals. The council is firmly of the view that the changes it advises are necessary to meet the evolving needs of students in Irish schools and Irish society (Looney, 2005).

But the Minister had spoken and it was clear that that the NCCA vision of a radical overhaul of senior cycle provision would not be adopted.

For all the rhetoric of change, however, there was a counter-discourse of continuity, mainly based on the status of the Leaving Certificate as the 'gold standard' of Irish education. The curriculum debates of the past few decades have tended not to challenge that status. The frequent allusions to the quality of the Irish education system in various publications and reports (e.g. NCC, 2009, ESG 2004, HEA 2002) invariably can be decoded to refer to the Leaving Certificate. The early CEB documents made little reference to the Leaving Certificate programme as such, except insofar as to suggest 'fuller provision … for the diversity of needs in the senior cycle' (1984, p. 10) and that 'the Leaving Certificate programme should be adapted to cater for the increasingly diverse needs of students' (1986, p. 33).

The 'untouchable' status of the Leaving Certificate (LC) was a constant refrain of the largest post-primary teachers' union, the ASTI, and of parents' groups. The status held by

the LC was also seen as a distorting factor in developments at senior cycle, because of its attraction for the great majority of senior cycle pupils, its recognition by employers as the default qualification for job seekers and by higher education institutions for entry selection purposes.

The programme changes introduced in the mid-90s were underpinned by a strategic decision to build upon the status of the LC rather than attempt to circumvent it (NCCA 1993, White Paper 1995). The LC suite was expanded to incorporate LCA and LCVP programmes. But crucially, no substantive change was introduced in the LC programme itself. Indeed, the terminology adopted served to reinforce its achieved and unquestioned status: thus, while the new programmes were designated respectively the Leaving Certificate Applied and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme, and as such carried with them the kudos of the 'gold standard' brand name, the traditional Leaving Certificate programme retained its simple designation with the parenthesised *established* occasionally used to distinguish it from its newer (and by implication, yet to be fully established) sibling programmes. Again, this was the implicit emphasis in the Minister for Education and Science's response to the NCCA 2005 proposals for senior cycle development: hands off the Leaving Certificate!

The major acid-test of change in the early days of curriculum reform was centred on the vexed question of pupil assessment: specifically, the role (if any) of the class teacher in assessment of pupil performance for public examination and certification. This is the area of perhaps the most remarkable change in policy discourse that occurred over the period under review. In the early days of curriculum development, change in the modes and techniques of pupil assessment was taken as a *sine qua non* for curriculum change. The early pilot projects were characterised by such innovative forms of assessment. Even then, however, teacher participation was sanctioned by their union only on the basis of such assessment modes being experimental (TUI, 1977)[22]. Crooks and Trant noted the significant challenge presented by teacher attitudes to a role in assessment, and

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[22] As the CDU projects were mostly located in vocational schools, the main teacher union concerned was the TUI; the other major union, the larger ASTI organised in secondary schools, was to develop a more intractable position in opposition to any form of teacher assessment for purposes of certification.

acknowledged that the solution achieved was only short term: 'this classification as experimental can only remain for a limited period of time, and thus the problem of teacher participation in assessment still remains' (1976, p. 7).

With the establishment of the CEB this issue of assessment was still prominent. In the first of the moments under investigation, the key documents consistently referred to the need for new forms of assessment involving a direct input from the classroom teacher in the process of national certification. Both *Issues and Structures* and *In Our Schools* made explicit reference to the need for new forms of assessment to be introduced. The CEB documents remained quite coy as to the nature of those changes: there was no specific recommendation that school-based assessment should be introduced, though this was the clearly understood sub-text. The White Paper of 1995, however, appeared quite explicit on this point:

> No fundamental change in the Junior Certificate is under consideration at present. However, an essential shift in emphasis from external examinations to internal assessment will be implemented in the future (p. 60).

While appearing to take up an unequivocal position on this issue, that position was effectively neutralised by the opening sentence which parked the issue for the foreseeable future: an initiative led by the DES and the then Minister some years previously to introduce a significant component of teacher assessment at Junior Certificate level had foundered on the rocks of a concerted ASTI campaign in opposition (ASTI 1989, TUI 1990, *Irish Times* 1990). The scars of that battle would take some years to heal.

The vexed issue of school based assessment was removed from the national debate in education by the mid 1990s; its last appearance came in the early evolution of the Leaving Certificate Applied. Agreement reached at the LCA Steering Committee was overturned in the 1994 Annual Convention of the ASTI which instructed all members of that union to have no involvement with the new programme unless there was an unequivocal policy of no teacher involvement in assessment (ASTI, 1994). This was achieved and a more complex system of external assessment was introduced for the new programme.

By the time the NCCA produced its proposals for senior cycle development in 2004/5, no suggestions for teacher involvement in assessment were included. The debate in NCCA circles had moved into a new arena of discourse, focusing on the concepts of Assessment *for* Learning and as distinct from Assessment *of* Learning. However, the restrictive effect of a state examination system that operates entirely on an external basis continues to compromise the capacity for real curriculum change at school level.

The discourse of flexibility

Flexibility, as we have noted, is a recurring theme in the international literature, with particular reference to globalisation. As we have seen in the early documents CEB addressed at moment one, the term 'flexibility' was frequently used, largely in the context of curriculum freedom for schools to innovate within the national system. As such, it is closely linked to the concept of 'validation'. In the more generalised literature pertaining to education policies in a globalised economy and a knowledge society, the term more frequently refers to qualities desired in learners, rather than in learning programmes. As such, 'flexibility' is often seen as a euphemism for impermanence and insecurity of employment (Ozga and Lingard, 2007).

In the Irish curriculum context, the early emphasis on flexibility receded with each subsequent publication. The curriculum landscape envisaged in the early rhetoric of development included a variety of school-based local initiatives, within a looser national framework. What emerged in each succeeding version was a national framework that may have contained a greater amount of internal flexibility, but within an even more restricted external environment for local initiatives. Such internal flexibility was presented for example within subject syllabuses in terms of options and electives or within programmes as different tracks (LC, LCA, LCVP) or levels (Higher, Ordinary and Foundation).

Validation, as we have seen in Chapter Three, was a prominent issue in the first document under consideration in this work. This was a reflection of the origins of the

impetus towards the establishment of a national curriculum agency from within the local curriculum development activities of the 1970s, especially those of the CDU in Dublin and the CDC in Shannon. The issue of validation of locally generated curriculum initiatives had begun to slide down the agenda by the time of the CEB final report in 1987. The concept was almost entirely absent from the documents analysed in 'moment two' except for the treatment of the Junior Cycle Schools Programme in *Towards the New Century*. However, it reappeared quite strongly in the NCCA 2005 document, specifically in relation to the development of Transition Units (TUs).

There is a significant difference in the treatment of the concept of 'validation' as between the first and the third moment, however. In its original usage, the concept of validation was seen as a means through which a curriculum devised at a local level (in a school or a network of schools), could receive recognition on its own terms by the central authority; in the later usage, such local initiative is restricted to a specific template, supplied by the central NCCA authority and within which the school or group of schools must operate. Indeed, the 'template' concept is a recurring theme in the recent curriculum documents of the NCCA: all new syllabi are required to conform to a template set out in some detail in a guideline to NCCA education officers and course committees (NCCA 2006). A template is inherently a control mechanism, no matter how liberally it might be interpreted.

The discourse of consultation

If consultation was the innovative hallmark of the CEB, bringing curriculum into a public domain, by the early 21st century it had become a devalued currency. The concept of 'partnership' had become embedded in the education policy-making process. Consultation has been formalised and systematised within models of representation: the composition of the NCCA itself, like many other education bodies, epitomises how the education partners – teacher unions, school management authorities, parents and others – have established themselves as participants in the process. The NCCA consultations on senior cycle curriculum in the early years of the 21st century were designed, as we have seen, to reach out beyond the well-trodden circuits of partnership. This was achieved both

by new modes of consultation (web-based questionnaires, focus-groups, and other media), and also by enlisting new audiences, including school pupils and community voices. Greater political power and influence, however, does not necessarily accrue from such an extended reach in consultation.

The nature of curriculum consultation, coalition-forming and consensus has grown over the twenty five year period of this review. In its early days, public participation was a novel process and was exploited as a validity base by reformers within the CEB. The various publications of the CEB, notably its newsletters, contained extended lists of committee memberships and names of participants. *In Our Schools* (CEB, 1986), the final report of the CEB, contained a complete list of all the formal sub-committee membership of the previous few years, but no acknowledgement of the professional staff, other than a generalised note of thanks in the Chairman's foreword. By direct contrast, the latter-day publications of the NCCA are presented as the corporate, collective product of the NCCA, with direct reference only to professional staff who were engaged in authoring the reports and a generalised acknowledgement of relevant committees in the Chief Executive's (significantly, not the Chairperson's) foreword (e.g. NCCA, 2002). Similarly, the house style for minutes of committee meetings has evolved over the years from an early model that privileged the role of members, especially the elected Chairperson, at the expense of the anonymous officials, to one where only NCCA executive staff or education officers are named in the body of minutes. This may not be significant in itself but it signifies a shift in the power relations and dynamic within the NCCA curriculum design process.

In this context, there is a tendency for the education partners to adopt a role of watchdog rather than lead participant in the process of curriculum design, ceding professional control to the executive staff. This may have the effect of improving the quality of product in terms of technical proficiency but it lowers the degree of felt ownership of the process among the partners (Granville, 2008a). As a result, the political struggles that occur from time to time between the NCCA and the DES may not fully engage the

education partners within the NCCA. It would appear that this was the case in relation to the Minister's response to the NCCA proposal on senior cycle development in 2004/5.

Curriculum in Contemporary Education

Criteria for what constitutes a curriculum of high quality have been suggested by Hargreaves and colleagues (1996). They hold that a curriculum should be simultaneously challenging academically, relevant to the immediate and long-term life prospects of the learner and imaginative in fostering creativity, imagination and a sense of wonder. Designing and implementing a curriculum that achieves maximum impact in all three of these areas is rarely achieved in the classroom, let alone at national level. Arguably, Irish curriculum policy has been relatively successful in setting a challenging agenda for learners in respect of academic standards. The achievement of relevance in the curriculum has been a more recently recognised dimension, but one wherein significant improvement has been made in the past twenty-five years, at post-primary level. The introduction of an enhanced vocational dimension in the curriculum has been a major contributor to this process through the introduction of courses like the TY, LCVP and LCA.

The imaginative dimension remains, however, the most difficult of the three criteria to achieve and certainly the least successfully achieved in Ireland. Many of the features of the globalised education reform movement, notably its focus on performativity and the use of learning outcomes as an instrument of design, may further restrict the imaginative dimension of the curriculum. In that context, Hargreaves (2003, p. 3) later describes the quandary of teachers addressing the pressures of the globalised knowledge society, caught within a triangle of competing pressures and imperatives:

- To be catalysts of the knowledge society and all the opportunity and prosperity it promises to bring;
- To be counterpoints for the knowledge society and its threats to inclusiveness, security and public life;
- To be casualties of the knowledge society in a world where escalating expectations for education are being met with standardised solutions provided at a minimum cost.

This role confusion, as between catalyst, counterpoint and casualty, is encapsulated in the teacher's relationship to the curriculum.

An attractive metaphor (noted earlier in Chapter One) has recently been proposed (Schwartz, 2006), that of the curriculum as a novel, a text which each teacher should read and interpret for themselves and their students. This is an almost romantic statement in today's educational climate of systems, targets, learning outcomes and performance indicators. Schwartz proposes that, instead of writing curriculum guidelines that steer and define pupil learning and attempt to address every classroom situation, 'the focus of curriculum-writing should be shifted … towards engaging, and even educating, teachers' (p. 452). This call echoes that of Elliot Eisner (1990, p. 68) who noted that 'good curriculum materials both emancipate and educate teachers'.

The NCCA (2006) guidelines for senior cycle curriculum design presuppose a number of audiences and users of syllabus and other curriculum component material. Mentioned in particular are teachers and students, with examiners also noted as significant other users. There are other possible users who could also be identified, including parents. However, in the Irish context in particular, there are two main users who utilise curriculum material, especially syllabuses, as central to their work – and neither teachers nor learners are among them. Rather, it has been examiners within the State Examination Commission and commercial textbook publishers and authors who have been and continue to be the most avid curriculum readers. Both these constituencies in turn have become the major interpreters of the curriculum as transacted in Irish classrooms.

A third likely audience that has grown in significance in recent years is that of policy-makers, not just in the DES but also, as we have seen earlier, across the social partners, especially among business and economic interests who demand visible, tangible evidence of education addressing the needs of economic growth. When rhetorical or specific demands are made of the education system – as they are, with increasing regularity, in areas of economic or social concern – it is to curriculum documents that recourse is frequently made. Thus, learning outcomes have the potential to be closely scrutinised in

terms of their specific responsiveness to performativity requirements beyond a strictly educational context. In that environment, learning outcomes can be interpreted as performance indicators, not just of learner achievements but of teachers and schools.

Is the pedagogic discourse of the classroom (and by extension, the role of the teacher) simply a means to relay the message designed elsewhere to the learner, with the least amount of interference? Or does the teacher have some significant engagement with the curriculum as such? The early curriculum development movement was premised on the central role of the teacher (Crooks and Trant 1975; Stenhouse, 1975; Trant 1997, 1998), both as an individual and as a member of a collaborative, professional community. Bernstein (1990, p. 166) similarly challenged the belief that 'pedagogic discourse is itself no more than a relay for power relations external to itself; a relay whose form has no consequences for what is relayed'.

In this context, the curriculum specification of the national authority was perhaps a necessary frame within which curriculum reform should operate, but it did not begin to comprehend the real meaning of curriculum. The vision of the CDU in the 1970s was predicated on two core ideas, as Crooks and Trant (1975, p. 8) described:

> The Curriculum Development Unit has demonstrated the potential for innovation through a consortium of co-operating schools, and through a belief in the ability of teachers to diagnose and solve problems; whatever the future is, these two aspects of the work should remain.

However, in the subsequent evolution of curriculum policy, neither of these aspects of curriculum development remained as cornerstones. Instead the hegemony of the centralised examination system, exemplified in the structures of the Junior and Leaving Certificate programmes, remained the monolithic centrepiece of post-primary schooling through three decades of curriculum reform.

Summary and Conclusions

Subjectivity, ownership and subversion

Earlier in this thesis (Chapter Two) seven key concepts underpinning critical discourse analysis were introduced; text, discourse, inter-textuality, genre, subjectivity, hegemony and ideology. The first four of these have informed the treatment of key texts in curriculum at selected moments over the past quarter century in Chapters Three, Four and Five. The inter-related concepts of hegemony and ideology were addressed lightly in those chapters but more explicitly in the review of curriculum policy in Chapter Seven. 'Subjectivity' was an implicit feature of all chapters and an explicit one in Chapter Six, where this researcher was presented as a particularly visible subject of the process. It is appropriate before concluding this thesis, to develop further this concept of subjectivity in the process of curriculum reform.

Subjectivity in critical discourse analysis refers to the role of the individual and the identities constructed by individuals who are engaged with the discourses under review. As noted in Chapter Two, the key individuals and groups whose identities are involved in the current research are those engaged in curriculum development, teachers and policy makers. The teacher, in particular, is perhaps the key agent of the curriculum in the construction of identity. This does not diminish the central importance of the learner, who is the ultimate object of the curriculum design process in terms of rationale and purpose. However, the role of the teacher vis-à-vis the curriculum is the crucial point of subjectivity in terms of the policy discourse explored in this thesis. The teacher as a subjective professional has been effectively disempowered in this process.

Three claims have been made in this thesis: that curriculum discourse has signalled a sequence of shifts from the periphery to the centre, that at critical moments discourse generated at the margins has been adopted at the centre, through a form of co-option or colonisation, and that, while the policy orientation of the centre has not been overtly ideological, it nevertheless has facilitated neo-liberal orthodoxies. This has had the more generalised effect of not just neutralising the key agent in the system (the teacher), but of

co-opting most if not all agents as complicit partners in this operative if not intended project of de-professionalising the teacher.

The curriculum development movement of the 1970s and 80s provided the fuel and the energy, the rhetoric and the rationale for the wave of curriculum reform that was marked by the establishment of the CEB/NCCA. The early initiatives of that body bore the hallmark of that movement as manifested in the first phase of revised syllabuses for the Junior Certificate and such initiatives as the Leaving Certificate Applied and the Junior Certificate Schools Programme (JCSP). A key contributing factor to this was the direct involvement of personnel from those early projects in the initial work of the CEB/NCCA (Granville, 1995). That early linkage between the subversive curriculum developers and the first stirrings of national reform was a manifestation of subjectivity, held within the small community of curriculum developers, many of whom were employed as the seconded education or development officers within the CEB/NCCA.

However, teacher 'ownership' of the curriculum, a constant refrain of the early curriculum development movement, was subsequently deemed to have been achieved through the representative nature of the NCCA, and the majority presence of teacher representatives on course committees defining new syllabuses. Such corporate ownership through teacher unions is quite a different concept to the 'lived' ownership of a teacher interpreting and implementing the curriculum in his or her own classroom (Lowe, 2007; Trant, 1998).

Some vestiges of such authentic ownership remain in locally supported networks like that of the JCSP or through specific initiatives like the *Teaching and Learning for the Twenty First Century (TL21)* project supported by a philanthropic foundation (Hogan et al, 2007). However, the great majority of curriculum-related work undertaken in recent years has been driven from the centre. Curriculum support networks, such as the Second Level Support Service (SLSS), are almost entirely defined as support for the implementation of national examination courses and programmes (Granville, 2005).

This is perhaps the most dramatic change in curriculum discourse over the period from the late 1970s to the first decade of the new century: the shift in teacher subjectivity from that of ownership through a form of subversion to that of ownership through corporate participation. The hegemony achieved by the partnership model of education has been evident in both the signposts and the silences (Sugrue and Gleeson, 2004) of current educational policy. The signposts identified by Sugrue and Gleeson are the emergence of partnership as an ideology, the consensus on curricula for a knowledge economy or society and the emphasis on academic standards, while the silences in discourse are those around education structures, teacher education policy and educational research and evaluation. What has emerged, despite peripheral noises offstage, is a powerful post-primary curriculum consensus that recognises only technical issues of syllabus definition and, crucially, of examination protocols.

Reflections on the research experience

This thesis has been a policy study carried out through a qualitative research process. The research has been an exercise in critique applied to the emergence and shaping of curriculum policy in Ireland over a period of more than twenty five years. As a critique, it has consciously rejected the currently dominant forms of evaluation which rely on outcomes measurement, performance indicators or impact assessment. This position has not been adopted on crude ideological grounds: the validity of such approaches in appropriate contexts is recognised. However, this research is a policy study that seeks to address the values and meanings of policy orientations, how those values and meanings have evolved and the extent to which political, economic or educational ideology has played a part in this evolution. The methodological approach for such a study needs to be compatible with the objective.

In applying the research and presenting its findings, the thesis has adopted an epistemological approach that locates the researcher as a visible participant in the process under scrutiny. The benefits of a personally engaged research approach lie in the insights that this perspective can give, in terms of what Eisner (2001b) describes as the sense (or 'feel') and the reference (what the work refers to) of the work under scrutiny. The

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challenge of this form of research is to avoid anecdotal reminiscence, personal bias and ego-centric narrative. The analysis must be evidently rigorous to retain credibility, for while every researcher has an individual experience and perspective, this need not compromise their objectivity (Phillips and Burbules, 2000, p. 28).

With that in mind, this research project has utilised a frame for critique provided by the methodologies of critical discourse analysis and auto-ethnographic narrative research, informed by one element – the 'first turn' presentation of the artist – within the visual art 'crit'. The metaphor of the palimpsest has been used as a point of reference in reading the traces of early influences and ideologies behind the rhetoric of subsequent discourses. The palimpsest – a parchment, a manuscript page from a scroll or book, or a tablet that has been scraped clean and used again, or sometimes simply overwritten – serves as a point of connection between various threads that run through the research. Thus, the palimpsest has direct resonance with the visual arts forum of the 'crit' where personal histories, images and artefacts are presented insofar as they have shaped the emergent work, even though few if any traces of those sources may remain. The palimpsest also has a strong resonance with the methodological approach that Foucault has described in his 'archaeology of knowledge', the peeling away of layers to reveal what is often hidden or forgotten, and the 'sedimented history' that Ricoeur describes in his narrative theory. The process of uncovering sedimented histories has been addressed specifically in the personal narrative described in Chapter Six, but also in the analysis of discourse in Chapters Three, Four, Five and Seven, insofar as they have revealed meanings that have been concealed or misrecognised over the passage of time.

A further comment may be offered at this point in respect of the application of the crit in curriculum policy critique. The first element of the crit, the 'first turn' of the subject of the encounter, has been conceptualised as the presentation of the researcher's own evolution in the practice of curriculum development. This constituted the frame within which Chapter Six was presented. This was further developed through adopting Ricoeur's concept of 'oneself as another' in replacing the interactive second element of the crit with an interaction between earlier iterations of the researcher as curriculum developer, and his

current perspective as researcher. The overall ambition has been, to echo Goodson's (2005) construction, to understand the social and political through understanding the personal and biographical.

This research project had an early ambition to enact a formal crit as part of the process of curriculum critique. The trajectory of the research took a slightly different direction resulting in a more introspective and self-reflective application of the crit. However, a literal application of the crit retains a rich potential for further curriculum critique, perhaps involving some key participants in curriculum development in Ireland over the past thirty years.

This thesis, it is hoped, will contribute to the creation of a community of trust in the fields of curriculum evaluation and education policy studies. Such a community should have a shared and common understanding of the object of study, in this case Irish curriculum policy as evolved in the late twentieth century. That shared understanding does not require a shared interpretation, but rather clarity as to the meaning of what is actually being studied. Habermas (1990, pp 23/4), as noted earlier, holds that

> any meaningful expression … can be identified from a double perspective, both as an observable event and as an understandable objectification of meaning. … To grasp (and state) its meaning, one has to participate in some (actual or imagined) communicative action in the course of which the sentence is used in such a way that it is intelligible to speakers, hearers and bystanders to the same speech community.

Ultimately, this research, with its treatment of language, meaning, narrative and ideology, aims to contribute to such a communicative action in policy development.

Soup-twisting on the curriculum
The Leaving Certificate Applied launched in 1995 included arts education as a core element. An elective was offered in Drama, itself a breakthrough in Irish education. The NCCA Education Officer for Drama submitted teacher guidelines in hand-written form. These were typed up within the secretariat. One unit within the Drama module was entitled 'Script-writing for the stage'. The type-written version that emerged however,

offered 'Soup-twisting for the stage' – a simple error, easy to pick out at proof-reading stage. However, such was the pressure of the time that proof-reading (the responsibility of the present researcher, who as Assistant Chief Executive of NCCA was directing this project) was rudimentary at best. The uncorrected text was issued to all schools.

The error was discovered by the Education Officer concerned who was understandably upset and mortified. More curious however, was the fact that no other complaint, observation or comment was ever received in NCCA about this misprint. It remains on the official record as part of the official documentation for the Leaving Certificate Applied, although the guidelines have since been updated.

In its own way this was a literal palimpsest, the overwriting (albeit accidental) of one text upon another. It serves as an amusing illustration of the fault-lines that exist between the curriculum as defined nationally, as interpreted locally and ultimately as experienced personally by learners. In the case of drama, the small group of teachers active in this field 'owned' the curriculum to such an extent that this misprint was at worst a puzzling feature in their planning. The nature of the curriculum structure and of their own commitment to drama in education meant that they were able to work without literal, pedantic adherence to these guidelines: in other words, they were able to 'subvert' the official documentation. However, in more mainstream curriculum areas and in a conventional examination syllabus context, such a misprint might have had much more dramatic outcomes.

In a system where defined syllabus and highly specific examination protocols dictate the professional lives of teachers, the ambitions of national curriculum planners are highly circumscribed by the reductive interpretations of examination requirements, textbook publishers and the routines of schools. The pressure of parents and the practice of teachers combine to channel learning to the requirements of the examination. The resultant gap between curriculum rhetoric and classroom reality is huge. The communication gap is such that 'soup-twisting' might indeed be as valid a learning activity as any other for curriculum planners to propose.

As Lawrence Stenhouse (1975, p. 223) noted more than thirty years ago, 'communication is less effective than community in the utilisation of knowledge'. That is a lesson still to be learnt in the construction of Irish curriculum policy.

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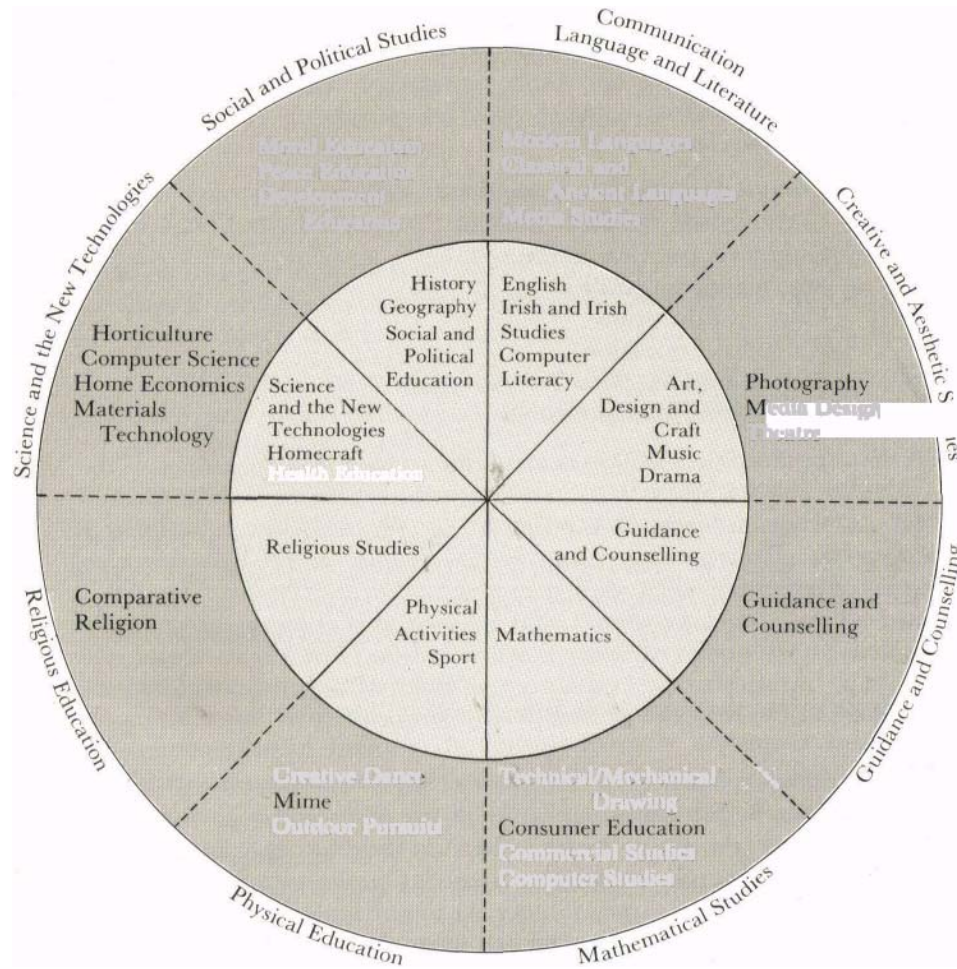
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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: THE CEB 'WHEEL'

APPENDIX 2:

How Many Bricks
In The Wall?

By Gary Granville

Garry Granville took his B.A. in history and politics at UCD and his higher diploma at Maynooth College. He has taught in vocational schools and St. Patrick's Institution. He is currently engaged in the "Early school leavers project" with the Curriculum Development Unit in TCD, though the views expressed here are strictly his own.

DIRECTIONS FOR CHANGE IN EDUCATION

A decade ago, many people were stimulated by the prospects of change in society. Proposals and strategies for radical restructuring of th"e"so5ial order were thrown up internationally: Choice and challenges were offered to authority and the public. Today, it is not question of choice, only of challenge. The truism of the day is that the micro-chip will change everything and the question now is not *if* but *how* society must change. Our educational structures are central to any change in our society and this is particularity true in Ireland, with such a young population. The tragedy is that the enthusiasm and excitement which permeated the sometimes anarchic and directionless quest for change in the late sixties and early seventies, have now largely disappeared. Instead, a sense of apathy and cynicism has emerged in social thought. This is most alarmingly evident amongst the young, to whom education is of particular importance.

The changes within Irish society have not yet been recognised by the educational establishment. In this article, I will suggest just four areas that could be used as a starting point for qualitative change to our educational system. The ideas are not particularly new, merely a re-statement of some of the thinking of a decade ago. Perhaps with the experience now gained, we may transform these existing theories to practice in the eighties.

[i] *Control of Schools*
Equality of educational opportunity has long been one of the catch-phrases of educationalists world-wide. In the Irish context, the introduction of free second level education in 1966 was seen as a decisive step towards this goal. Since the scheme began operation however, it has served to highlight a glaring anamoly in our educational system, one which it was meant to abolish — the existence of two types of schooling available in the state, one publicly controlled, the other privately owned.

Selection of student intake to schools has for a long timer been a sore point among parents and teachers. It automatically created an apartheid system among our children. Putting it crudely, the "Tech" is still seen by many as the school for the second-best, for those young people who could not get into the local private school (in most cases in Ireland, the private school is a religious-owned school). Protests from such private school authorities that selections has been abolished are privately refuted, even by staff in the same schools. Democratically controlled schools, like those under the authority of Vocational Education Committees, accept any student wishing to enroll, the only limitation being that of space. For other schools in the same catchment area — in receipt of public monies but not accountable

to the public — to operate in a selective manner towards student applicants naturally causes great resentment among parents and teachers.

When this point is raised in debate, it is often branded an attack on the church (usually Roman Catholic). In essence, however, it has nothing to do with the religious in education. There is a very simple point at stake here: Public accountability for public funds. The more general question of choice of school can only be dealt with when publicly-funded private schools are abolished. Until then, we cannot even talk about equality of educational opportunity.

There are many changes necessary in Irish education, but none will have any meaning until the central concept of democracy is established. Towards this end, we should, I believe, strive for Regional Educational Authorities, democratically constituted, who would control *all* schools within their alotted region, and who would ensure that all schools serve any student who wishes to avail of them.

[ii] *Curriculum Content*

Having established the concept of democracy in education, the next critical factor that challenges us in the eighties is the *content* of education. "Relevance" was the rallying-cry of many of the idealists of a decade ago, and like any over-used word, its meaning has become blurred. Cliches wear us down and numb our critical faculties, but if we coldly ask "how relevant" is much of what is taught in schools, the answer is frighteningly negative. A rigid, centralised school curriculum, where content and standards are calculated downwards from university criteria, ignores the great majority of young people at school. The result is that for many students, the years at school constitute an obstacle course that must be endured before real life begins.

In order to bridge this gap between schooling and reality, teachers must be given the freedom to introduce into the classroom topics which are not presently catered for in the national syllabi of the Department of Education. The legitimate fears of parents that their children might suffer by not following the traditional rationally recognised courses can be met by delegating to local authorities the power to initiate and certify new courses, monitored of course by the national educational body. Teachers must be given a voice in the drawing up of what goes on in the classroom. Courses dealing with the realities of life — work, relationships, adolesence, media, the local environment and culture etc., — are very difficult to incorporate, given the present "tyranny of exams". Alternative modes of examination—continuous assessment, project work, self-evaluation— all offer possibilities of freedom which could revolutionise school as we know it. Some programmes geared towards these ends have been carried out in selected areas in vacant years but further development is urgently needed. This can only be done by positive initiative at national level and, in the long run, this is a political decision which must be made.

[iii] *Alternative Education*

Should our educational system be so restructured as to become more obviously relevant to the needs of our young people, there still remains the question as to whether orthodox schooling is, of itself, adequate in meeting the needs of all. The ideas of the "de-schoolers", of Illich, Reimer, Freire and others, which were quite fashionable some years ago, now seem to be forgotten. Maybe there is a need to scrutinise them once again and see whether they can contribute to education in the eighties and after.

There is a neglected but significant minority among our school-going population who patently derive little or no benefit from their formal education. The national figures for drop-outs from education make interesting reading in this context. Of one cohort of students entering second-level education in the nineteen seventies (the figures here apply to one cohort in the early seventies but may be taken as typical) only about half were expected to sit the Leaving Certificate. Much more alarming is the fact that almost

one third left school without obtaining either a Group or Intermediate Certificate (and this proportion is higher in some areas). For these thousands of young people, even the most primitive justification of schooling — "go to school and get a certificate to get a job" — was rendered meaningless.

Investigation of alternative structures to serve these people has been piecemeal at best. Experienced teachers continually express frustration at being forced to cater for such students within orthodox structures: willingness to try alternatives is stifled by lack of opportunity. Community-based alternative or 'free' schools have been occasionally tried, with varying degrees of success. It is however, an area that must be further investigated in light of the fact that our schools so blatantly fail to serve the needs of so many students.

[iv] *Education and 'Outside' Agencies*
No one today would claim that education alone will solve the problems of society. Consequently, we must not see education and schooling in isolation from the other powerful agencies in society. Links must be developed between industry, employers and unions and the school, that each may serve the other. Most importantly, the role of the community generally, of parents in particular, must be stressed. These links are inextricably bound up with what actually goes on in the classroom: Unless the curriculum is flexible enough, such interaction is impossible.

This whole area is vast and difficult and there are no simple strategies or solutions. There are some general observations that need to be made, however. In recent times, industry has been critical of the Leaving Certificate course as being inadequate in preparing for their social responsibility in later life and co-operation between industrial and educational authorities in devising suitable programmes is necessary. However, the social responsibility of industry should extend further down the range of students, towards those who leave school at or below the official school-leaving age. The non-achievers at school, those who at best are seen as "factory-fodder", are those most in need of aid from outside agencies, and industry in the past has not been noticeably concerned about them.

Similarly, parental involvement in schools is most obviously lacking in areas where student drop-out is highest. There is a strong case to be made for the appointment in every school of a Community Worker, whose sole function would be liaise with parents and to devise schemes to further their involvement with school. Recent suggestions indicate that the School Attendance Officers, hitherto seen as primarily "catchers of mitchers", are anxious to develop their role in this direction.

Perhaps it is appropriate that in an article which attempts to re-assess some of the heady ideas of the late sixties, early seventies, I should end with a reference to a rock-group which in those days was seen as revolutionary iirid challenging! Pink Floyd's recently popular song "Another brick in the wall", with its gloomy refrain "we don't need no education/we don't need no thought control" is negative and cynical, and as such, sadly typical of our times. Maybe our ideas, like our music, need a return to the roots.

APPENDIX 3

BLOOD ON THE TRACKS
Curriculum Development as a Subversive Activity

Should I panic now?

It is May 1995: a hotel outside Limerick. A seminar for school principals, to introduce the new *Leaving Certificate Applied* programme, is in full session. I have been deeply involved in the development of the programme and feel an almost paternal commitment to it.

But the material hasn't arrived. The set of folders containing the specifications of the new programme are being rush-printed and are due to arrive by courier from Dublin mid-way through the morning. I am sitting at the top table, chairing the meeting, casting an eye to the door at the back of the hall, looking for a signal that the courier has come. As the seminar continues and my colleagues make their presentations, I am strangely panic-free: this situation is not new - I have been here many times before.

My mind drifts to another conference, the CDU dissemination conference for the Early School Leavers Project, back in 1982. A major event at the time, the then Minister for Education and various heavy-hitters from the world of education in Ireland and Europe were in attendance. We produced a series of reports on aspects of the project, for the conference. The pressure was intense in the weeks and days leading up to the event. I felt the adrenalin rush then, and the cold panic of anxiety, writing the texts (far off days before word-processors) late into the night and all through the weekends, each page being typed as soon as it was written, printed as soon as it was proofed, bound as soon as it was printed and still the final copies didn't arrive until the speakers were addressing the conference.

Yes, we've been down this road many times before ...

Back to the future: just before we break for lunch, the signal comes - the eagle has landed. I leave the table and go to meet the courier. We unload the van, piles of booklets which must be sorted, collated and placed in ring-binders for each school represented at the seminar. I rip open the bindings and, in doing so, I make a deep and painful incision at the top of my index finger, a paper cut which draws a stream of bright red blood. Just what I need.

We announce that the material will be distributed after lunch, and as the participants move off, we set to the task. The team on duty, as it happens, consists of experienced curriculum developers, associated with the CDU and with the Shannon centre. Almost automatically, we assume the customary position: placing the bundles in order, along the tables lined up in the lobby, we walk in sequence around, collecting and collating the various documents into complete, individual sets which are then inserted into the each of two hundred binders.

As I walk around the tables, picking and sorting the booklets, I hold my bleeding finger out, to avoid staining the documents. Only later do I notice that I have left a little private trail of blood on the tiled floor inside the door, smudged by feet as I walk in repetitive circles.

This is curriculum development: blood on the tracks.

I have come to believe that curriculum development is essentially a matter of going around in circles, literally and figuratively. Behind all the theory, all the high-blown rhetoric, it all comes down to people doing fairly mundane things again and again - with feeling. This applies to classroom practice as well as to curriculum planning and support. There are relatively few revolutionary insights or conceptual breakthroughs: the premium is on passion, commitment, intensity of endeavour and consistency.
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A constant feature of the early curriculum projects of the CDU was the production of teaching and learning material involving similar style production lines, collating pages, reams of paper. That ad-hoc production line, with its attendant trail of blood, in that Limerick hotel is for me not only an image of the constant slog of curriculum development but metaphor for the circular nature of development in general. The new programme for the Leaving Certificate Applied which we were introducing that day was firmly shaped by the experience and practice of the curriculum projects of the seventies and eighties. And as I do a mental audit of the various developments with which I am currently involved, at this period of extensive educational reform, I realise that there is really very little new under the sun; most new ideas are not new at all - it's just that their time may have come at last.

Amidst the ocean of dross which is management literature, the sane voice of one writer rings true. Karl Weick, an American social psychologist wrote (1976, 86): 'Causation is circular, not linear. Most managers get into trouble because they forget to think in circles.' In other words, it is necessary to keep referring to first principles, which in curriculum terms, remain the same as they were twenty years ago - the need for education to respond to the needs of learners as they are, not as they ought to be; the need to enhance the professional role of the teacher through enabling her to exercise control over what she teaches; and to treat as a priority the needs of those students for whom the system has not worked.

The books on my shelf
Sometimes, here in my office in the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), I look at the books on my shelves. About once a year, I cull from the ever growing collection of books and reports those which I think have served their time and purpose. As I look at the ones which remain, a pattern emerges. I can pick out the ones which moved in here with me, the ones which for one reason or another have a continuing significance. There are three sets of such books and documents which resonate with me now, providing three lenses, as it were, through which I can look back at my

time in the CDU. The lenses complement each other, and overlaid upon each other they give a fuller, three-dimensional perspective to these reflections.

The first set consists for the most part of slim paperbacks, many of them from the Penguin Education Specials series. I get a perverse pleasure seeing the titles and remembering what they meant about twenty years ago. Illich, Freire, Reimer and the other radical writers, deschoolers and revolutionaries, savage critics of the education system as we know it. And there among them I can make out the worn, thin spine of Postman and Weingarter's *Teaching as a Subversive Activity*, the red ink almost faded completely away. In a way, the titles and the concepts were more important than the contents. Over the past few years, as I work as an uneasy civil servant, the meaning of these titles has served as a sort of validation of my role here, a subversive sleeper at the heart of the bourgeois state.

For we were all subversives back then. I was a Labour Party activist when I was a student in the seventies, and remained so when I started teaching, and later when I worked in the CDU. At that time, being in the Labour party was an anxiety-driven occupation. Left-wing members of the party spent an unhealthy proportion of our time in conflict with the party establishment (the rest of our time seemed to be spent in justifying our continued membership of the party to smug cynics outside the party). Reconciling principle with pragmatism was a way of life in the Labour Party.

I liked to think that there was a consistency between my political activism and my teaching career. Unfortunately in my case, the inherent schizophrenia of my political existence was also carried over into my work in education. There was always something of a contradiction between the fact of working in the school system and espousing the revolutionary deschooling ideas of Illich or the political and cultural radicalism of Freire. These libertarian ideas required the most progressive concepts of school organisation and curriculum structure, concepts which were not immediately apparent in the Irish school culture of the 1970s.

But I had been fortunate to start teaching in Ballyfermot Vocational School, which had a deserved reputation as a centre of innovation and had a large and hugely interesting staff and student population. My experience there and later in prison education and in the Liberties Vocational School led me to temper much of the wilder rhetoric of the deschoolers with the realities and possibilities of the classroom. At the time I subscribed to a British journal *Radical Education* which espoused a policy of change from within the system. Among the spin-offs from that journal were some collections of student work in creative writing from schools in inner London: those books are still up there on my shelves as well.

There was a worldview bound up in all of this which incorporated my job, my political activism and my general lifestyle - the music I listened to and the books I read. It was a minority position in the 1970s, I suppose, but we were a comfortable minority and we felt the tide was coming our way, that things were changing.

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Things changed alright, but not as we might have anticipated. The shape of politics certainly changed: to be a member of the Labour Party today is to have an entirely different experience to that of twenty years ago. The years of Thatcher and Reagan, of Gorbachev and the fall of the Soviet Union and the strange decade of reaction that was the eighties were not part of our vision of the future. But after all the traumas and crises of cultural and political change, and the inevitable questioning and doubting that we went through, the values and positions we held back then still seem valid now - and in the passage of time are closer to fulfilment.

More specifically, the apparently marginal nature of curriculum development in the seventies is now the conventional wisdom: the first draft of the 1995 White Paper was written by the curriculum projects of that era.

The Project Reports
The second set of books, the second lens through which I look, are the reports of the Early School Leavers Project, the Dublin Inner City Project and of IFAPLAN the agency commissioned by the European Commission to coordinate the network of projects of which they were part.

> "The first problem facing this project is the vastness and the vagueness of the question of early school leavers".

I was appointed leader of the Early School Leavers Project which was established in 1979 and these were the first words I wrote in a memo for the first meeting of the project team. It was a vast and vague brief, and that first memo was really a cry for help. The Project was hugely ambitious in the rhetoric we adopted. At the outset we identified three main target groups, which I described as follows -

> *potential early school leavers*: students who attend school classes but who intend to leave at the earliest possible opportunity, usually without having sat for any certificate examination. We plan a series of curricular interventions to cater for their specific needs.
> *actual under-age leavers*: the persistent non-attenders at school, who make only occasional appearances in class. Much of our work with this group will be based outside the physical boundaries of the school.
> *post-15 school leavers*: students who have left school at fifteen years but who would be interested in and would gain from part-time continuation in education. A specific group mentioned in this context are (sic) young girls in inner-Dublin who traditionally gain employment relatively easily and who have built up no antipathy to school. Such a programme would concentrate on social education and preparation for adult life.

The "vastness and vagueness" of our brief was a constant frustration. Over time, of course, I've come to live with - indeed to enjoy - ambiguity and uncertainty as necessary features of educational leadership and as prerequisites of successful innovation. But that was not so easy to live with as a raw young project leader, possessing less self confidence

than might have been apparent. Other jobs had specifications, parameters, none moreso than teaching. Nothing had prepared me for the uncertainties of curriculum development.

That first year was hugely traumatic for the four of us on the team. After spending the initial weeks trying to define what we were about, meeting with a wide range of interests and engaging in what seemed like a never-ending brain-storming session among ourselves, we eventually engaged with real pupils and teachers. A two-week work simulation exercise we ran in the Liberties Vocational School in the centre of Dublin, where I myself had been teaching the previous year. It was a moderately successful exercise involving team members working closely with some teachers and a selected couple of classes. At last we seemed to be doing something.

Our next engagement was an ambitious step - a six week intervention in Colaiste Dhulaigh, Coolock, a large school serving a suburban housing estate on the northside of Dublin. The intervention took the form of an alternative curriculum designed for a selected group of students identified as being in need of remediation in behavioural or other ways. Project team members were deeply involved in the running of the programme, alongside some school staff members.

All these years later, I still get a cold sweat when I recollect some of the experiences of those six weeks. By any standards, it was not a model of how a project team should interact with a school staff. There was intense but not well directed planning, there was confusion of roles as between project and school and there was lack of clarity as to who was in charge. All of which was a failure on the part of the project leader. The six weeks of the intervention were hugely draining on everyone who took part. The effect on the students was neutral, at best. The effect on the project team was shattering and was exacerbated by a poor relationship with the external evaluator of the project who was a constant presence throughout the experiment. Not a good start.

Things got better, though, when we got calmer. A small but significant intervention, Education for Youth In Employment (EYE Programme), was run in the city centre, with young female workers, on part time release to attend school one afternoon per week. It was a tight and successful innovation, largely due to the calm steering of Hanna O'Brien of the project team.

Colm Rock, another member of the team took the earlier work simulation exercise and developed the idea further. The result was the Work Simulation Centre which we opened. This was in a disused school annexe, a freestanding prefabricated building in its own grounds, with the exotic name of Fort Ostman. Schools brought groups of students here, for a week at a time, for simulated work projects. This became a very popular exercise, schools reporting valuable benefits for participating students.

We also began to get a grip on the school programme end of things and with a small network of participating schools, we developed the Junior Cycle School Certificate Course, a framework for an alternative curriculum for potential early leavers. As part of this development we developed a Pupil Profile System which provided an alternative

form of assessment and certification for these students. All these years later, the White Paper on Education *Charting Our Education Future* (1995) devotes a significant section to the introduction of the Junior Certificate Schools Programme which is precisely the same programme, whose time has finally come, having survived so long as a pilot venture.

It was only with time that I came to appreciate the scale of what we were trying to do. A number of different factors combined to place our work in a wider context. One of these was the European context within which the project was operating. It didn't take me too long to find that our work was at least equal to that being carried out in most other countries and much more ambitious than most.

Those are the reports which are there on my shelves still. A series of six reports, colour-coded, and presented at that aforementioned dissemination conference in 1982. Reading them now, I am surprised to see how well they stand up to the passage of time. At the end of the first round of projects in 1982, a series of reports was published at a European level, drawing on the experience of the Europe-wide network. A substantial number of the issues dealt with in those reports reflected the work of the Irish projects. In particular, I was pleased to notice that some important papers, notably in the area of assessment and certification relied to a considerable degree on the work of our project.

The take-up of ideas and practices beyond the scope and lifetime of a project is a notoriously slow and tortuous process. It is guided as much by chance as by coherent planning. Thus, I recall soon after taking up my current post, being at a meeting at which a Department of Education official quoted as a powerful authority an EC document on assessment. The passage quoted had in fact been written by me as part of one our own reports; it had subsequently been incorporated verbatim in one of the European publications. The different status and authority achieved by the same idea expressed in the same words in two different documents was a telling lesson in the processes of dissemination and power.

For the duration of the project, I was with the school programmes, but I was leaning towards the out-of-school. At the end of the project, in 1982, I wrote that while plans for the development of programmes for Target Group 2 - the truants - were made, the project had not engaged directly in this area of work: "this remained the area of greatest regret for the Project team and one which it is hoped will be taken up in the near future".

The Barge and Other Mythical Beasts

The third set of books on my shelves is a strange collection of old journals: *Canaliana* is the title, and they relate to the world around the Grand Canal in east Kildare. But I was never a canal boat enthusiast - those journals are mine alright but why are they still on my shelves?

They were collected as part of the Barge Project, the phantom project, the scheme that never was but which served as a necessary myth for the Early School Leavers Project, for

a bright shining moment before becoming submerged in the more conventional work of curriculum development. The Barge Project lived on, however, a subliminal influence occasionally resurfacing in different forms.

The idea was that we would get a barge, equip it with basic facilities and drift up and down the canal with a group of drop-outs, teaching them about life as well as developing literacy and numeracy and the practical skills necessary to navigate the barge around city waters. Zen and the art of canal barge maintenance, as it were. We tried hard to locate a barge; part of our search took us to the canal waterways of east Kildare, where we found no barge for sale, rent or gift - but I did gather this bundle of journals which have stayed with me as memento.

As the project became more and more preoccupied with the school programmes, we lost some of the mission of the barge. But we reawakened the idea, towards the end of the ESLP and at the beginning of the new project - the Dublin Inner City Project.

We had some vision which at times was of a drop-in centre, at times a workshop, at other times a community-run centre of activities. This garbled vision came to be called "shop-front co-ops", a term which for a while we all understood until we realised that it meant absolutely nothing intelligible to anybody else. But it belonged in the same noble tradition as the barge and at heart was loyal to the same principles. Out of this process of evolution emerged the School Street Centre. I was always struck by the dramatic irony of the name: the street called after the school where we opened the non-school, the free-school, the de-school.

The new project developed an intense relationship with community activists in the south inner city of Dublin. It was - is - an area of severe deprivation, high unemployment and an emerging environment of drug-abuse. It was also an area with extremely committed community activists and youth workers. We were particularly concerned with reaching kids, between about 13 and 16 years, who had dropped out of school and who were at risk in various ways. We secured the use of one wing of the large primary school building in School Street, in behind the Guinness brewery.

Through community contacts, we identified 15 young people who agreed to attend our pilot free-school for a six-week trial period. It was to be an experiment in truly student-centred learning, with a negotiated curriculum centred on practical activities, group work and a "home-base" in the centre where meals were prepared and the informal curriculum pursued.

That was another spell of intensity, involving project team members. New personnel - Siobhan Lynam and Mary Owens - were very prominent in this venture. We were all direct participants in the innovation, literally from conception to implementation. The recurring reservation I had was that such was the intensity and involvement of the project team, that the initiative would never be replicable.

The intensity of the initiative was exemplified in the Friday afternoon sessions when all staff and students would meet to review the week's work and to resolve any problems which might have arisen. The sessions were chaired by Art O'Briain, an experienced leader in the area of group work. The sessions were sometime fraught with tensions. People would sometimes be challenged over alleged breach of contract - failure to carry out cleaning duties for which they had been rostered, and the like. But at times all sorts of hidden fears and angers would surface.

On one such occasion, as tension in the group seemed to be rising, an awkward silence fell. After a few moments, I felt I should break the silence and defuse the ominous charge I sensed in the atmosphere. Art killed me stone dead as I started. We remained in silence for what seemed like a full five minutes. Then suddenly the young man at the centre of the discussion exploded with an extraordinary confusion of frustration and anger and resentment. Out of the ensuing interactions, a calmness and a resolution was found through the collective energy of the group. It was an amazing and intense session.

I spoke to Art later. "It's always in the silence" he said, "With this group it's like living through a hundred years of solitude - there's been so much unsaid over time".

Our own team meetings were intense as well. On more than one occasion rows broke out over the direction the project was taking; we had shouts and yells and the occasional walkout. But a strong bonding emerged as well and the shared frustrations brought people together. After one such meeting, when we had been discussing the next phase of the School Street experiment, I bundled up my papers from the table. Amongst them I accidentally took a page on which one of the team had been writing. I have it in front of me now. It reads -

        needs: have they been identified?
                "   "   " met?
        What have the team learned?
        Wed - Thurs - What is the new phase?
        What is the new phase??
        What? How? When? Who? Where?____

I think those notes are great - especially the repeated phrase "What is the new phase?" This captures something of the tension we were under. These questions were the heartbeat of the project because we truly didn't know where all this was leading and we were driven only by shared commitment and the expectations of the young people who had opted in to the School Street experiment.

From Periphery to Centre
The School Street programme was repeated a couple of times and attracted a lot of attention, most notably from other European projects. We ran a few related projects for young women, based in a flat complex not far from School Street. We tried to start another School Street-like project on the north side of the river, but it didn't work.

Shortly after that time, I changed jobs, taking up a position with the newly established Curriculum and Examinations Board. This body was a major national initiative. In adapting to the new environment, there did not seem to be any immediate connection between the School Street initiatives - or even the school based programmes with which I had recently been involved - and the national issues of curriculum reform.

I know now, however, that the delirium of those projects is of more value than the more conventional curriculum work with which we were engaged. The Junior Certificate programme and more recently the Leaving Certificate Applied and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme owe their existence to the pioneering work of the CDU and Shannon projects: the radical - and peripheral - curriculum approaches of those projects has now become the national norm. Similarly, the School Street project - the myth of the Barge - and the EYE Programme and other such initiatives pioneered principles and approaches which are now becoming accepted as the norm: already national programmes such as Youthreach and VTOS reflect the spirit of those early ventures.

A recent novel of American politics - *Primary Colors* - contains a brief passage in which a presidential candidate is discussing social policy with his advisors. His wife, a strong social analyst rejects his reliance on inspirational leaders; she says -

> "... You can't teach inspiration. What you do is come up with a curriculum. Something simple, direct. Something you don't need Mother Teresa to make happen - and that's what you replicate."

> "But you can't sell anything if the teacher is a dud ... You've gotta figure out a way to make great teachers. If you can really liberate them, reward them for creativity, they'll make their own programs ... You ever see a curriculum inspire wonder?"

No, a curriculum as a statement of learning objectives, of knowledge content and of skills, cannot inspire wonder. The triumph of the CDU experience was that the curriculum was seen as the vehicle for liberation of teachers' creativity. And that surely does inspire all kinds of wonder.

GARY GRANVILLE April 1996